

*History of Philosophy
История на философията*

WITTGENSTEIN ON OTHER MINDS

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Abstract. When philosophy of mind goes into every detail in explaining about consciousness and its every aspect, the problem of other minds being its part is not spared. In such context going against the traditional way of giving justification Wittgenstein novel approach to other minds is remarkable and is close to the phenomenological understanding. The analysis of the sensation of pain as one of its important factors in solving the other minds problem is unique and it is this that proves how Wittgenstein dissolves the problem rather than giving a solution. This article focuses Wittgenstein's two important factors: Private Language Argument and the concept of the sensation of pain in dissolving the issue. And in this I have made an attempt to show how his novelty in approaching this problem gains importance even today.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; private language; pain; other minds; expression; experience.

Introduction

In Wittgenstein's philosophy, the problem of other minds has been very much discussed in many ways. The problem of the sensation of pain is an important factor in understanding the other minds, and we find a great deal of discussion in this regard. It's been said that during the year 1929 – 1930, a group of students who surrounded Wittgenstein was considered as 'Toothache Club' which shows the importance of their discussion on this problem. In our discussion on Wittgenstein's understanding of other minds we will, first of all, discuss private language argument, and then try to analyse the importance of the sensation of pain and thereby show how the problem has been solved by Wittgenstein.

I. The Private Language Argument

A language is said to be 'private' only when the speaker alone or only a limited group of people can understand. This may be in the form of codes or abbreviations that are understandable only to those individuals or a group. But this can't be said as private language because, be it in the form of codes or abbreviations, these are transcribed by using any common language that people speak. And this type of language is of little importance to philosophers as nothing can be done further.

There is another type of private language which is of philosophical interest and which Wittgenstein espouses. Accordingly, private language is something that an individual uses to describe his immediate sensation of which others can't know or understand about it. However, it is hard to imagine how such type of language can be structured. Based on the above two definitions of private language Ashok Vohra defines:

Private language is a language that refers to the experiences of which only the speaker is aware and of which it is not merely the case that it is not understood by anyone other than the speaker, but more, that it is logically impossible that it should be understood by anyone other than the speaker. (Ashok 1986, 35)

The private linguist uses the words that we use in our ordinary language. But how can a private language be a common language? A hint occurs in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation* where he states;

what reason have we for calling 'S' the sign for a sensation? For 'sensation' is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation: that when he writes 'S' he has something and that is all that can be said. 'has' and 'something' also belong to our common language. (Wittgenstein 1958, sec 261)

Wittgenstein here is pointing out the impossibility of private language. Thus, if the private linguist wants to use common words of our ordinary language, then by doing this, he is only misusing its primary purpose for which it was meant, and thus it no longer becomes a private language. Another important thing is that words of our ordinary language are governed by rules of grammar which is a part of our language. Thus to understand words in a language one also has to know the rules that regulate that language. But since the private linguist can't make use of our words, it also becomes meaningless to say how he can use rules of our language to express his private language. Thus, anyone who wants to make use of private language not only fails in his project of making his private language intelligible but also fails to communicate it to others. This brings out two important aspects of the problem,

(a) Only the speaker alone can know and understand the language used to describe his sensations, feelings, and experiences and secondly,

(b) Others won't be able to understand anything about the speaker's experience.

In this private language argument, there are two fundamental mistakes. The first is related to language that something is private to me because only I alone can know about it. This can be stated as incommunicability of experience. The mistake here is that one can obtain the meaning of a particular sensation only when he has experienced that sensation for himself, but he can't be able to communicate it to others. Incommunicability of experience seems to be something absurd and meaningless. It is absurd because unless and until I communicate my experiences to others I may not know or understand the meaningfulness of my experience. Because if I say I alone can know what my experiences are that would be meaningless. The reason is that by denying this, I deny something that is very much known to others.

It is also absurd because knowing something doesn't merely confine to oneself; it also includes other. Hence, if I say only I alone can know my pain, then it is nonsense because others can easily be able to know whether I am in pain or not. Thus, according to Wittgenstein, as long as the experience is concerned, it is always communicable. My use of the concept 'pain' or 'a toothache' is not private because these are the words of our common language and their meanings are accessible to others and are understandable by others. Therefore, all the experiences that we express are not private but publicly expressed in our ordinary language. It is understood by others and responded as well. If it is stated that experience is incommunicable, then that may not be considered as experience as such.

The second mistake about the private language argument is related to our experience. The mistake about the nature of experience is the acceptance of the view that experience can be private and that I alone can have it or possess it. This means we can't know the feelings and experiences of another. This would mean I have the private ownership of my feelings and experiences. This is understood as inalienability of experience which expresses a tautology. The mistake about the nature of experience leads to solipsism. A solipsist bases his ground on the mistaken use of the nature of language. For solipsism in principle, existence would mean the existence of his self and his mental states alone. And experiences, in reality, would mean no other experiences than one's own. According to Wittgenstein solipsism would mean anything that an individual comes to know is known only to the individual himself and reality would refer to his own present experiences alone.

In this regard, Wittgenstein says that: The solipsist's mistakes a grammatical proposition, namely, 'I can't have another man's pain' to be an experimental proposition. The proposition 'I can't have another man's pain' expresses a logical and not a physical impossibility. (Norman 1963)

According to Pradhan:

The grammatical proposition that 'I can't have someone's pain' doesn't deny that I may feel pain in A's body or that A's pain and my pain are the same. This is because, in our form of language that I understand and sympathize with my friend in his suffering. In our form of life, there is no doubt that we understand one another and that we pity a suffering man, or, that we feel his pain by administering medicine. (Pradhan 1981, 23)

There is certainly a distinction between a grammatical and experimental proposition, and that which can be logically impossible needn't have to be impossible in reality. There are thus two ways Wittgenstein has dismissed solipsism. First of all, the solipsist considers a grammatical proposition to be experimental proposition and considers experiences and feelings of others as experimental proposition and denies its accessibility by others. And secondly, from the private language argument point of view that we discussed earlier. What Pradhan tells is also something interesting, for when I say I can't feel someone else's pain doesn't

mean that my pain and someone else's pain can't be same. Because, our form of life enables us to understand one another and so when someone says that I feel headache my pain also can be similar to him when I feel headache.

II. The Sensation of Pain and the Problem of Other Minds

What would Wittgenstein's response be to a question like; 'How our words refer to sensations?' Wittgenstein would say that whenever we express a sensation sentence like 'I am in pain' it doesn't mean that it refers to certain of our sensations; it rather expresses the pain itself. So what Wittgenstein might be having in his mind is that, he is rather trying to focus our attention on our expression of pain to what we call them as pain. The pain he would mean as crying. It is not a kind of description, but expression using our external behavior which doesn't refer to pain rather expresses pain itself. For Malcolm, sensation words are to be considered as our natural expression of sensation in place of behavior. That means, there is a similarity of behavior and expression of sensation using sensation words. In other words, verbal utterances don't refer to behavioral expression rather, it expresses pain itself.

Let us take up few objections that may be raised here. How will someone know that a child coordinates between his sensations of pain to his natural pain behaviour? When the child expresses sensation words, then there may be occasions that it might have learned sensation words using its corresponding behavior. And then later it must have known primitive expressions using mere utterances of words. There is another possibility which can't simply be ignored, for the child may also have developed learning sensation words and behavior from its parents and close relatives.

Let us take the example of 'toothache' and try to analyse this. Suppose, I wanted to teach a child what toothache would mean and to teach I would show a tooth and tell that anyone who feels a toothache will feel that deep down his tooth there develops a sensation of discomfort that causes great pain and as a consequence of this the person feels severe pain. Now, after having explained this, if it happens to the child to whom I have explained and he behaves in the manner I have explained then, will I or someone say that he has learned the word toothache? Will I know what toothache means according to him? Did the child understand what toothache means? It is possible that the child learnt the sensation of pain in this way. And it is also possible that the child in this way may also have picked up expression of sensations from one's parents. However, there is no logical necessity involved in it. And so, we can say that our understanding of pain is expressed in our natural expression and so the concept of 'referring' becomes irrelevant and pain therefore is the expression of pain itself and it doesn't refer to pain behavior.

Thus, when I say 'I am in pain' then it doesn't mean I simply express those words nor does it refer to the expression of my behaviour rather my expression of pain and behavior are the same thing. According to Malcolm; "the important similarity that Wittgenstein is trying to bring to light is that the verbal utterance and the natural pain

behaviour are each incorrigible. (Norman 1963) Thus when an individual says that he is in pain he can't be said to be in error, for he can't say by mistake that 'he is in pain' nor is it possible to groan by mistake. I can't misidentify a pain to be a tickle or my pain in hand to be in my leg. It is possible that I may not be able to make a distinction between what is called pain and ache but that doesn't mean that I can't know that I have a sensation of pain. What I can't do is that I can't express what my exact sensation is but that doesn't hinder me to say that I am in pain. Thus, using 'incorrigibility of the utterance' I am in pain Wittgenstein is saying that; 'I know I am in pain' and 'I don't know whether I am in pain' are both senseless. (Norman 1963, 60)

He further states it can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I know I am in pain, what is it supposed to mean except perhaps that I am in pain? Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations only from my behaviour, for I cannot be said to learn of them, I have them. The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain, but not to say it about myself. (Wittgenstein 1958, Sec 246). Thus, whenever I say 'I am in pain' it is a genuine expression, where there is no deception involved in it.

Another important passage where Wittgenstein explicitly expresses the other minds problem is: If one has to imagine someone else's pain on the model of one's own, this is none too easy a thing to do; for I have to imagine pain which I don't feel on the model of the pain which I do feel. That is, what I have to do is not simply to make a transition in imagination from one place of pain to another, as from pain in hand to pain in the arm. For, I am not to imagine that I feel pain in some region of his body. (Which would also be possible.). (Wittgenstein 1958, Sec 302)

What this would mean is that, if I am to know what pain is by seeing how the other is feeling the pain, then I would know the feeling of pain only after I have felt it. Once I know the feeling of pain, I will also know properties involved in pain in my case which I experience. For, it would be impossible for me to speak of another's pain unless I have experienced what pain itself is and of which Wittgenstein said; 'this is none too easy' to which Wittgenstein himself proves wrong because of the fact that we certainly experience feeling of pain of others.

One would again bring the 'sameness' concept here as it seems in the above passage. But Wittgenstein would deny this. He says: "But if I suppose that someone has pain, then I am simply supposing that he has just the same as I have so often had. That gets us no further. It is as if I were to say: 'you surely know what 'It is 5 o'clock here' means; so you also know what 'it's 5 o'clock on the sun' means (Wittgenstein 1958, Sec 302).

It means simply that it is just the same time there as it is here when it is 5 o'clock' – the explanation by means of similarity doesn't work here. For I know well enough that one can tell 5 o'clock here and 5 o'clock there is 'the same time,' but what I don't know is in what cases one is to speak of its being the same time here and there." So, the idea of sameness of pain can't be brought into the purview

in knowing the pain of others. It is to say that we can't simply experience the pain of another in the same manner the individual himself experiences.

And again,

In the same way it is no explanation to say: the supposition that he has a pain is simply the supposition that he has the same as I, for that part of the grammar is quite clear to me: that is, that one will say that the stove has the same experience as I, if one says: it is in pain and I am in pain. (Wittgenstein 1958, Sec 350)

When we discuss the above passages, we find that the sameness aspect applying in both cases does not seem to help in any way. For, we are not able to decide whether both the cases are same. I can't say that I have the same pain as a dog or a cat would have or another human being would have. There is always a difference in the manner I feel pain, and the manner other animals or things or in that case other human beings feel pain. My feeling of pain, therefore, can't be similar to others feeling of pain. Hence, inferring the pain of others based on my pain and saying that they too must be undergoing similar pain would not work in case of Wittgenstein. That is to say that from the inferential argument perspective Wittgenstein doesn't solve the problem of other minds.

There is another aphorism of Wittgenstein where he says; "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul." (Wittgenstein 1958) What he means is very much obvious. For whenever we see an individual writhing in pain, we rush towards him to help him, care him, if necessary do first aid medications or else try to take him to a nearby hospital and so on. At that moment, we don't develop a kind of attitude that we would have towards a mechanism even if it is very much valuable to us. What we do is, we would only try to find out its malfunction and try to repair it if necessary and would not express our sympathy towards it as we would do towards a pet or a suffering man. We, however, don't express any sorrow towards a mechanism.

Wittgenstein offers various remarks as to how we express our attitude towards a suffering man. But we don't develop a belief in this regard rather it is something else, for example, Kripke says:

Wittgenstein would reject any attempt to 'explain' my attitude and behaviour toward a sufferer by 'belief' about his 'inner state.' Rather, once again the order is to be inverted; I can be said to think of him as having a mind; and in particular as suffering from pain, in virtue of my attitude and behavior toward him, not the reverse. (Kripke 1982)

Thus we don't give justification of our behaviour by appealing to the belief in the inner states of others even if they seem to be so. Kripke here gives an important concept of Wittgenstein that it is our belief about our own experiences of pain that give the feel of the feelings and experiences of pain of others.

According to Kripke;

What plays the appropriate role in the formation of my attitude is not a 'belief' that he 'feels the same as I,' but an imaginative ability to 'put myself in his situation.

(Kripke 1982, 140) And Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Remarks* §65 says; When I am sorry for someone else because he is in pain, I do of course imagine the pain, but I imagine that I have it. (Wittgenstein 1958)

Kripke thus says that: When I am sorry for him, I ‘put myself in his place,’ I imagine myself as in pain and expressing the pain. (Kripke 1982, 140) So, even if we think that some kind of inference is involved in this and yet it can’t simply be given over emphasis.

Many philosophers think that if we take analogy as a solution to our psychological states, then Wittgenstein’s solution may fall in line with logical behaviorism. But for Wittgenstein what is most important is, it is a pain and not the behavior. But later he considers the behavior and not what goes into the mind of an individual (pain). Thus, if we think that it is not the pain that is important in the case of a suffering man rather his behavior that matters to us much, then can we just forget the pain or ignore it and adhere to ‘pain behavior’. We however can’t detach pain from pain behavior, pain and pain behavior therefore becomes same for a suffering man. The individual’s cry is the manifestation of his behavior and his utterances of words are the expression of pain itself. Hence, if we think sensations and feelings are inner and belong to the particular individual and therefore, they don’t belong to the public language, then does it mean that only those language that is public will be meaningful in public?

Many philosophers think Wittgenstein to have stated in this manner, but many too have gone against this view. So, what has been said above and what must be adhered here is that it is not whatever goes on in the mental states of others that are important but leaving aside this, it is the behavioral expression of pain that is very much important, and it is this which represents pain itself. Pain behavior, therefore, is nothing other than pain itself. This is very much important and essential while we analyze Wittgenstein’s understanding of pain and pain behavior.

In Overgaard’s word:

Because pain denotes a type of sensation rather than a type of bodily movement, that it denotes such a sensation as considered completely independently of all behaviour, bodily expression, etc. This simply doesn’t follow (Overgaard 2005).

And again;

Pain is a phenomenon that stretches its arms out in many directions. Pain, considered just as a type of unpleasant sensation, plays many roles in publicly observable reality (Overgaard 2005, 256).

Wittgenstein thus defines pain as a pattern in the weave of our lives. (Wittgenstein 1958) So, when we think of someone suffering we don’t make a distinction between pain and pain behaviour; these are the same thing for an individual.

Suppose we separate pain from pain behavior then it will be difficult for us to understand the concept pain and many philosophical problems that may be raised. And the application of pain in cases where we are supposed to apply or not apply

wouldn't be known. But how can we positively work it out for a solution? It may be possible through the concept 'expression' which would not make a distinction between pain and pain behaviour and bring them closer to one another. We then have to consider that it is the living human body which is the locus of both pain and pain behavior and expression would be the new term we would make use of it. Let us take a few of Wittgenstein's examples.

We see emotions- as opposed to what? We don't see facial contortions and make the inference that he is feeling, joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. (Wittgenstein 1958)

Again he says: Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor, and so on. The light in other people's faces. Do you look into yourself in order to recognize the fury in his face? It is there as clearly as in your own breasts. (Wittgenstein 1958)

Wittgenstein thus rejects the idea of inference in knowing the feelings of others. He rather pointed out that we can see happiness or joy in other's faces immediately. It becomes very much obvious in our facial expression. Even if it is difficult for us to find out what is happening behind someone's face yet it would certainly be known or personified in the faces.

But how about pretension? Pretension is a kind of simulated expression as against genuine expression. Genuine expressions are that which is completely transparent where one can't find any place for insincerity. The genuine facial expressions are not to be taken as a combination of something that is partly inner and partly outer, something genuine and something pretending. They are rather like the body pulling out of itself closer to mind and mind dragging out of itself and both getting closer to one another. Genuine expression, therefore, would be a genuine expression of the totality of body and genuine expression of the totality of mind, something that is transparent to both. That is, where we may find Wittgenstein as closer when he says 'one sees his soul' which would mean both body and soul expresses the same thing. So, we can't imagine pretension here, or the question of pretension doesn't arise here. Wittgenstein, therefore, is trying to highlight the expression aspect of our behavior in understanding others.

But how would we understand the concept of knowing, thinking or the feeling of nostalgia? How would someone know that I am thinking about my exam and know that I am not going to fare well? How would someone know that I am thinking about my mother and yet becoming helpless of not being able to reach out to her in her serious illness? And we may add innumerable other things. Once again, how do you explain about my present sensations, like perceptions, beliefs and understandings and so on? This is where we can also ask for the first person present psychological statements. In this regard Wittgenstein says;

We should not lump all ‘mental’ phenomena together and think that they are alike in all important respects. Our mental concepts are ‘widely branched,’ and the phenomena are widely dispersed. (Wittgenstein 1958)

Thus Overgaard in this regard says that;

What should be gained from all this, according to Wittgenstein, is the insight that the mental life of another is something that we can have cognitive access to; something that, under suitable circumstances, in various ways and with varying degrees of certainty, can be directly seen in the facial and behavioral expressions of the other person. (Rethinking Other Minds: Wittgenstein and Levinas on Expression, 2005, 258)

Expression therefore is an important means by which we can solve the problem related to other selves. But this again may drag us to behaviorism, for pain is one thing and expressing through behaviour is another. Having toothache and expressing is one thing while seeing my toothache without seeing my behavioral expression by others is different. Of course, there is the possibility of seeing this, yet it is also possible that we may not be able to see the pain of others. But think about the reverse of the argument. Do I also see my toothache? How would Wittgenstein react to this? According to him: It can’t be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I know I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean except perhaps that I am in pain? (Wittgenstein 1958) If I say that I see my toothache, then it would seem that I distance myself from my pain, start observing it and so on. But that I can’t apply to others, for I will be able to see their behavior and know their expressions. Thus, when we try to understand the problem regarding the dichotomy between the expression of pain and pain in one’s case and trying to know the expression of pain in others as different, then the problem would always remain insolvable. In my case, there can’t be any distinction between my pain and the expression of pain, but in the case of others, it is. Hence, we come to the conclusion that it is the expression be it facial or behavioral in others that give us knowledge of the existence of other selves.

Conclusion

In our discussion on the problem of other minds of Wittgenstein, we found that he has in many ways tried to discuss the issue. The concept of pain is an important aspect to understand the problem of other minds and hence through the discussion of the sensation of pain we found that pain is not merely to be understood as something that is confined to oneself in terms of inner mental state rather it is very much involved in our behavioral expressions. The analysis of pain and pain behavior always bring us close to psychological understanding but Wittgenstein’s approach gives us a clarification that pain and pain behavior can’t be understood separately. This analysis as well as his ‘expression’ therefore becomes a solution which dissolves the problem. The approach therefore is in a way tends out to be phenomenological in nature as we found in analyzing pain and pain behavior. And

on account of this reason Wittgenstein's solution seems to be distinct and unique from philosophers of recent times.

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