

## CHAPTER 6:

### *Concluding Remarks*

The private language argument consists of some of the most celebrated passages in twentieth century philosophy and it has generated innumerable interpretations especially because of its notorious nature and most importantly later Wittgenstein has treated the matter in an abridged and non-linear fashion. The problem takes various shapes with different interpretations which have made it a significant contribution to the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. *Philosophical Investigations* mainly consists of the thrust of the private language problem, but other later writings of Wittgenstein also have pieces of the problem. Mainly §243 to §315 of *Philosophical Investigations* are taken as the core of the private language argument. The thesis Wittgenstein developed has been a topic of interest among researchers as it has been able to arouse debates in many sectors surrounding the issue. Our objective is to see what makes it as unique as a philosophical problem; is it the nature of the argument itself, or the anticipations that have been made? The possibilities that the argument has created is another concern that needs to be taken care of. The ultimate aim would be to objectify the applications of this argument and to examine the possibility of a private language, if it happens to be so. We need to nullify any bias or pre-

conceived notion to do this job. The private language problem has a history that dates back to Descartes. We shall not discuss that history here as it has been done so earlier in the thesis. We could detect the errors or misconceptions regarding the argument while we have dealt with the issue. There are so many temptations that the argument offers, it is our objective to critically examine the temptations as well as to notice the dialogue between the author and the interlocutor of *PI* in settling the issue.

Wittgenstein has convincingly refuted the *Cartesian* dualism and its import by his PLA. The attitude of PLA appears to be a kind of behaviourism, but we do not think that this argument represents any philosophical theory like behaviourism. PLA is a great contribution to the understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language; his concepts of *form of life* and *language-game* have got their full shape by this argument. Speaking a language is a performance, not just in words, in action too. Language motivates a person to perform an act; it is the guiding force to the person. We think that language is the strongest and the most persuasive force to make a person present himself to the world. The communication that takes place is through language, whether it is verbal or non-verbal. Gesture and non-verbal communications also are parts of the language-game. The success of the PLA lies in its influential

nature in investigating some key concerns of philosophical analysis. It has enormous scope of interpretations which make it further appealing as an argument.

PLA is a complete package of all the nuances of analytic philosophy and it continues to capture diverse construal of the investigation that Wittgenstein is engaged in. The structure of the PLA is quite an interesting one. It has an author and an interlocutor engaged in a conversation between them. The interlocutor asks many questions to the author and tempts him to fall in the trap of a philosophical delusion. But the author is on target to maintain his agenda of bringing philosophical problems out of the muddle, and the greatest part of the endeavour is in its subtle play of arguments without any philosophical jargon. Wittgenstein invites us to an imaginary private language, this imagination is very essential in understanding the grammar. The approach of *Philosophical Investigations* is a no-nonsense one, because it explores all the aspects of analysis in a quite simple way. A very important means of access to the private language problem has been given by Stephen Mulhall in the following words which detect the failure of the likely private linguist in realising the other, or an internalisation of otherness that is essential for a linguistic communication:

Again and again, the believer in a private language is forced to treat the putative speaker of such a language as if he were always already divided or double, capable of being both measurer and measured, justifier and justified, giver and receiver: it is quite as if two people inhabit this body, each with its own hand (and the face a battleground between them – cp. *PI*, §286). He thereby implicitly acknowledges the internal relation between the acquisition of language and the acquisition of selfhood; but his depiction of it amounts to a painful parody – as if enacting a regression to the self-enclosed, even self-harming behaviour of Wittgenstein’s child in §244 – because it fails to acknowledge that both forms of articulation presuppose a relation to that which lies outside or beyond the self, since both presuppose an internalization of genuine otherness.<sup>211</sup>

### *The broader perspective of the PLA:*

The private language argument is a dialogue between the author and the interlocutor. The interlocutor is clever enough to pose some threatening questions about the privacy of language to the author. These questions are like traps, but Wittgenstein has made them look like the diseases which ought to be cured. The argument never really reaches the climax as it is inconclusive in nature. Even then, we must accept that this inconclusive nature has enhanced the philosophical significance of the argument. There is a narrator who raises the problem about the idea of such a private language that describes my inner experiences and that only I myself can understand. There is an interlocutor who takes on the position of a private linguist, he defends that the idea of a private

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<sup>211</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Wittgenstein’s Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination in Philosophical Investigations*, §§243-315 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 113.

language is possible in the sense of §243 and §256 in *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>212</sup> The issue by and large gets the shape in a dialogical form between the narrator and the interlocutor. PLA is peculiar in the sense that it offers the reader to make a handful of assumptions about the outcome and the intention of the argument. There is a sense that it proves the publicity of language, but the broader aspect tells us that language-game is always public and it depends on our use.

The uniqueness of PLA is its charming nature of the arguments and counter-arguments between the narrator and the interlocutor. The reader at times could be confused to judge which one is the view of the author if he is not careful enough. Wittgenstein has created a route where we can look for the probable solution. Let us think on the issue in a contemporary outlook: What should be the focal point when we deal with the PLA in the modern world? What can we conclude about the famous argument? One basic element in constructing the argument is the concept of rule-following. We have come to the point where we could no longer be rigid about private use of rules in speaking a language, only thing is that privacy is already on the verge of being public. Even if we use rule-free language, it is possible that the language could itself form a

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<sup>212</sup> David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 174.

rule unconsciously and be governed by it. We would like to say that there could be private use of rules, but not private rules; rules are always public in nature. Wittgenstein sets himself against phenomenalism, idealism, dualism in formulating his thesis on language being meaningful in its use. He is against philosophical *egocentrism*, his philosophy is *non-egocentric* in terms of the criticism of egocentric predicaments of unreliability of everything and his non-acceptance of the 'given', 'inherent', 'private object' or 'self' and so on. His philosophy is not about theorising concepts, rather it is a *therapeutic* practice. This is where Wittgenstein's philosophy of language could be compared to the Buddhist doctrine of *non-egocentrism*. The interlocutor in the *PI* is the absolutist, he is sort of bewitched by language into perceiving things as absolutely true.<sup>213</sup> A private linguist takes memory as a criterion to check his impressions of the private incidents. In the Buddhist philosophy, the self is a non-existent entity as everything is momentary and in a flux. Wittgenstein also does not seem to accept self as an entity that can be known by reflection to our inner feelings. Buddhist non-egocentrism is against the absolutism in the sense that it does not accept anything like soul as absolute.

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<sup>213</sup> R.A.F. Thurman, "Philosophical nonegocentrism in Wittgenstein and Chandrakirti: in their treatment of the private language problem", *Philosophy: East and West*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (July, 1980), p. 326.

I take private language problem as a cornerstone of the arguments against philosophical prejudices. Our prejudice from metaphysical assumptions makes philosophy clumsy to some extent and it limits the scope for treatment of a philosophical illness. Although I think there have been some interpreters of Wittgenstein, like Norman Malcolm or Rush Rhees who have followed Wittgenstein's writings in sheer awe and their interpretations of the PLA have somehow encroached the further possibilities arising out of the arguments. Their interpretations have made the understanding of Wittgenstein no less easy than the text itself. We have to address the real purpose of dealing with the PLA. Is it all about establishing that language is a public activity or the aim should be to clear the confusions? The application of language is done in the society or form of life, but it comes as a surprise when someone claims to use a private language. A private language is something spoken in a solitary mode, or within a small group of speakers. The single speaker or the group of speakers use certain codes, like giving a particular code 'S' to record their sensations and speak the language in a way that could only be understood by its speaker or by the group of speakers. Now the fundamental question that could be asked: Is this private enterprise could be regarded as language? Many followers of Wittgenstein have assumed that language is something only spoken in a verbal way, in community or *form of life*. This communitarian view has its limitation

also. When we take language as something only spoken, then the non-linguistic affairs will not be able to come under this proposal. It is true that language is spoken, but there are non-verbal languages too which could be used to communicate the feelings; gestures or indications could serve the purpose in this regard.

The PLA offers various solutions regarding the philosophy of language. The defining of them we may take into consideration is that sensation has a grammar which cannot be ignored. Sensation itself does not have meaning unless it is used in a grammatical form. The question is: In what sense has sensation a grammar? If we watch closely at the PLA we will see that 'pain' is nothing but a word, a sensation-term; the moment I say to someone "I am in pain" the sensation 'pain' is dissolved. The grammar here reveals the nature of the sensation, i.e. 'pain'. The sensations are no more private entities or unexplored objects, rather they are public ones. The motto of PLA is to show that language leaves nothing that is unexpressed. However, we focus on the intention of the argument to observe whether Wittgenstein only wanted to disapprove the possibility of a private language. If we want to assess the merit of the PLA, then we have to understand the broader aspects that are related with the argument. To a great extent PLA stands as a subject of typical philosophical interest because of its uncharacteristic nature of being a

cluster of propositions that are understandable in the ordinary language, but at the same time remains unpredictable in its consequences or interpolation of arguments. Wittgenstein has constructed the argument not only in favour of the *use theory of meaning*, he has set the tone for a *criterion-based meaning* where meaning of a proposition is validated by an independent criterion.

Even then, there is scope for further treatment with the help of PLA. PLA is often seen as an argument against the possibility of a private language. But I would argue that the argument has much wider implication. To settle the issue of privacy was one of the most important aims, but the bigger issue is whether one can think only in his own language and then use the language in a private *modus operandi*. However, the challenge before a researcher lies in the treatment of a philosophical problem, something that has been occupied both the empiricists and the rationalists for a number of decades. One can look at the matter in the light of the emergence of a new philosophical school of thought, i.e. the *Vienna Circle* that looked after the modernisation of philosophy getting it out of the cloud of speculative metaphysics.<sup>214</sup> Even that would not be

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<sup>214</sup> For a more detailed account, see Keld Stehr Nielsen, *The Evolution of the Private Language Argument* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), Chapters 2 and 3. It deals with the evolution that takes place since the movement of Vienna Circle thinkers who have sought for the physicalistic language. They were highly inspired by Wittgenstein's legacy in this field of study, although Wittgenstein had always maintained a distance from the group.

the real purpose of dealing with PLA. The PLA has gone through an evolution over a period of time as many philosophers have taken divergent paths regarding the interpretations. However, one finds that it is extremely difficult to deal with the privacy of sensations, especially the way Wittgenstein has sketched the idea of private sensations in §243 and §244 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. He has given the idea to portray the reality that depicts language as the medium of communication between the speaker and the hearer. There is nothing private between them, in so far as the communication is concerned. Many of Wittgenstein's followers believe that it was prerogative of Wittgenstein to unveil the nature of sensations. One may say that Wittgenstein has made a huge impact on the philosophy of language by bringing a new insight which was long overdue. It was Wittgenstein's sheer courage and philosophical honesty to innovate his ideas through the PLA, although it is quite common to ascribe the title 'anti-private language argument' to describe his arguments as he has refuted the possibility of a private language.

At a point of time when a giant figure in philosophy named Bertrand Russell had tried his hands to establish a rational privacy that would further inspire Ayer to formulate his opinion in favour of a private language, there was every chance for Wittgenstein to be sidelined in the

philosophical community of Britain. But then, it was his genius that made *Philosophical Investigations* as an epic text that would be in the limelight for many years to follow. In *PI* the private language problem has become the centre stage of all the philosophical attractions. Basically, the PLA has taken a colossal form in terms of the interest it has been able to raise among divergent group of philosophers.

What we find definitive in the PLA is its attempt to remove the cloud of metaphysics of sensations. While doing so, it has applied certain tools; they are *criterion based meaning, rule-following, language-game* etc. However, the theme is highlighted by the meaning in terms of its use in a society or *form of life*. This is why PLA is regarded as the soul of the *Philosophical Investigations*. As we have already discussed about the tools in the preceding chapters, we shall be concentrating on the merits of those tools here as well as their application. The reason that might have played a role for a criterion based approach towards meaning is Wittgenstein's approval of the existence of a private experience or sensation. He was not bothered by the sensation, neither he attempted to deny it. What he tries to show is that sensations themselves are not part of the *language-game*, but when they are expressed by language they become a part. One might wonder whether Wittgenstein had his 'picture theory' in mind while dealing with the private experience. His *Tractatus*

was concerned with the pictorial representation of reality, and he was thinking of the logical primacy of proposition-object relationship, hence picture theory could play a backdrop role in the relationship between sensation and its corresponding language. Unlike the *picture theory* model, Wittgenstein here is looking for the working of language. He goes beyond the domain of metaphysics, although his attack was more on the *Cartesian* semantics rather than the *Cartesian* metaphysics.<sup>215</sup> Going by his 'beetle-in the-box' argument, we can say that the thing or beetle inside has no place in the *language-game*; likewise sensations are private, but not sensation-language. Once the sensation is expressed by language, it drops out of consideration.

Wittgenstein's approach towards a criterion based meaning is defined by his inclination towards a standard of meaning that is based on the public stage-setting. Apart from that, he was looking for a solution to the problem of pain as a sensation whose nature has been known to be private up till then. Therefore, his task was to establish language as the medium of expression of the private sensation of pain. In doing so, he had to set a standard of meaning. Although, he has hardly given any particular idea of what should be the nature of a criterion, his followers

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<sup>215</sup> Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 250.

and interpreters have developed on his idea. A criterion is a vigilant on the application of language. One can associate the notion of 'criteria' to the verificationist account of meaning. When I want to know whether a person is in pain, I have to use criteria. Strawson, in this regard, also accepted that we need criteria for the third-person attribution of pain.<sup>216</sup> If I do not accept criteria of meaning, then it would be impossible for me to decide whether someone has rightly expressed his pain or not. Here the criterion is known by the behaviour of the concerned person, this is why Wittgenstein's account is alleged by some philosophers to be inclined towards behaviourism, but his notion of 'criteria' differs both from verificationism and behaviourism. Since he has applied the physicalistic structure of language, this misconception was bound to happen to some extent. However, the whole account talks about the use of the sentences in a community or *form of life*. In *Philosophical Investigations* 'use', 'custom', 'practice', 'technique' fall into the central category in terms of the nature of language.<sup>217</sup>

Now if we turn our attention to the concept of *rule-following*, Wittgenstein has explicitly discussed about the viability of a public rule. If Robinson Crusoe employs a language that is totally unique in nature, and if he

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<sup>216</sup> K.S. Nielsen, *The Evolution of the Private Language Argument*, p. 74.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

keeps a diary to record his sensations, he can be said to follow a rule privately; having said that even if he follows a rule privately he must be using some technique. Here a crucial point I want to make. Someone could easily follow a rule privately provided that he keeps certain points intact that are related to the rule being followed. But a rule itself cannot be private, for if it is a rule it must be staged against the backdrop of publicly governed activity. Insofar as the rule being followed privately is concerned, if someone like Crusoe uses a technique which he must do even to follow a rule privately, the technique 'in principle' or 'logically' can be known by some other, since the notion of 'technique' or 'practice' has a public usage and to judge whether Crusoe has followed a rule correctly or not, it must be publicly confirmable. It also connects Wittgenstein's 'diary argument' in *PI* §258 that talks about the failure of memory to be a criterion of identity. Memory as a criterion cannot enable me to distinguish between what is correct and what seems to be correct. Therefore, following a rule privately cannot be justified in the criterion based approach towards meaning. Merely to follow or obey a rule privately is not to follow a rule in the true sense of the term which is justifiably pointed out in *PI* §202.

Games are played under certain rules. The rules change according to the demand of the game. Some rules are common for some games, but there

is not a single rule that is common for every game. Rules are in a criss-crossing and overlapping nature surrounding the games. Similarly in language there are rules to be followed, otherwise one cannot define whether the language has been used properly or not, even it will not be able to communicate. Therefore, Wittgenstein has taken language as a game, in *language-game* rules stand like a sign-post. In his view, to imagine a language is to imagine a *form of life*. The private language argument has been able to set up a strong argument in favour of the public rule and the rules are never in isolation with *language-game*. The semantics of the sensation is the bigger picture in the PLA and it is to be found by the combination of apparatus of 'criterion', 'rule-following' and 'language-game'. As the private ostensive definition fails to provide the requirement to know the semantics of sensations, the employment of 'technique' or 'practice' is essential and in this regard concepts of criterion, *rule-following* and *language-game* are interlinked with each other.

What I have tried to show is the broader perspective associated with the PLA in this section. As in the contemporary philosophy it is hardly a matter to know whether private language is possible, the investigation more or less rests on Wittgenstein's intention, what he was trying to do with his notorious PLA and what the advanced scenario we could

achieve when we delve into the matter.<sup>218</sup> The huge impact it has made on philosophy of mind and language cannot be unearthed unless we have a comprehensive picture arising out of the PLA. The effort was to highlight and critically examine the picture and its merit.

*Looking from a bird's eye view:*

So far we have got the picture of the nature of the private language problem, while making a point about the intention of Wittgenstein with regard to his PLA. Now we focus on the very viability of the PLA. No doubt PLA has made a significant contribution on the philosophy of mind and language, but what would interest us is its ever enduring way to baffle the reader with its enigmatic character and inconclusive attitude. Why Wittgenstein would want to form an argument that has so much potent but hardly gives us a conclusion? What should be the reaction to the problem in contemporary philosophy? The greatest contribution, I think, Wittgenstein has made, is to force the reader to think deeply over the issue. Perhaps, this is the reason why he has not given any theory; it is for us to master the technique and skill to develop on the issue.

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<sup>218</sup> K.S. Nielsen, *The Evolution of the Private Language Argument*, p. 178.

We believe that it was prerogative of Wittgenstein to distance himself from the rest of the then philosophical community, especially the Vienna Circle that led him to move on with the ordinary language to solve the philosophical problem. Once he realised in the mid 1930s that there is a lot to be done with the ordinary language, he deviated from the *Tractatus* in terms of the methodological outlook. Regarding the PLA, he has given a great importance to the sensation and sensation language. It is very clear from the passages of *PI* §243 and §244, where he has imagined a language in which a person could talk to himself, give himself orders, ask himself a question and answer it. He has also sketched the possibility of words connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of sensation and used in their place. The phrase “used in their place” demonstrates the referring of a sensation. Wittgenstein remarks that when I say “I know that I am in pain” it gives nothing further for me to claim knowledge, it is trivial. My point is that Wittgenstein is quite right in saying that there is no point in affirming “I know that I am in pain”, but then I can easily claim about the pain in a better way than someone else guessing about my pain, though it is possible that he may understand my pain by the facial expression or behaviour. Here I accept Wittgenstein’s perception of pain which states “I know only from my own case” as grammatical. The grammar of a sensation is what Wittgenstein is looking for. The inspiration that we can take from Wittgenstein is the approach to

philosophy he has taken, the cloud which he wants to uncover and give us something that is free from any bias. Because one of the foremost concerns he faced is the way philosophers had taken 'sensation' in a totally enigmatic sense, was needed to be kept out of the road. For doing this, his *Investigations* could look itself unfathomable to some extent, but the real spirit behind his approach towards 'private language argument' is that *nothing is hidden*.

In order to understand the nature of the PLA, we have to focus the attention towards the nature of philosophy in Wittgenstein. By and large, Wittgenstein is cautious of our attraction to myth, in the sense of our tendency in language and thinking when we deal with philosophical problems.<sup>219</sup> He strives to *show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle*, to guide us to emancipate from the myth of bewildering in the jungle of confusions in discussing philosophy. This, we think, is the greatest contribution of the PLA. Philosophical discussions cannot be like fictions, it has to be grounded on reality. The cue we can take from Wittgenstein's writings is in our dialogical and methodological inputs. If we accept private language at the core level, it would be an absurd thing, as when a doctor diagnoses a disease he engages in some dialogue with the patient

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<sup>219</sup> Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein on Language and Ritual", in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, Brian McGuinness (ed.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 92.

before he goes for a machinery checking. He makes certain assumptions about the patient by listening to his problems, and there is a *language-game* involved in the dialogue. Whatever privacy the patient had with his disease or pain, is communicated in the dialogue with the doctor. The dialogical outputs help the doctor, also the patient to cure the disease. Similarly, in philosophy there are so many illnesses and therefore sets of therapies. The task that a philosopher ought to set as far as Wittgenstein is concerned is to go beyond the philosophical perplexities that form certain presuppositions in a person's mind. There are temptations in philosophy that can mislead us to the wrong way, but it is the language, its proper use which could save us. The temptation or bewitchment of language is what we have to be careful of. Anthony Kenny remarks:

According to the Christian doctrine we are all born in a state of sin; according to Wittgenstein we are not born in the state of philosophical sin, but we take it in along with language. Along with language, along with all the benefits which language brings, along with all the possibilities for our way of life which it brings, we take in whether we want to or not, certain temptations; we must resist these if we are not to be misled.<sup>220</sup>

One of the foremost temptations we find is to think of our sensations as private and their analogous language to be private too. This is not unnatural, as we have a being that has a private realm to some extent. We all think like this; we say "This is my private matter", or "This is

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<sup>220</sup> Anthony Kenny, "Wittgenstein on the Nature of philosophy", in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, Brian McGuinness (ed.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 15.

secret". This sort of privacy or secrecy is not what Wittgenstein is greatly concerned about, his concern is to problematise our sensations and resolve the problem by means of language. It is a philosophical illness to think deeply about our sensations and believe in its privacy. The *Cartesian* myth encourages doing so, but Wittgenstein looks for the grammar to solve this perplexity. One might say he was too cautious about 'sensation', but his concern was to rule over the mystery behind the privacy of sensation and while doing this he was automatically led to challenge the possibility of private language. We would like to point out that he was about to bring the solution about the relation between sensation and the language that expresses it. However his followers like Rush Rhees and Norman Malcolm have interpreted it as the *Reductio Argument* which is not totally correct.

What is still a matter of concern to us is whether Wittgenstein had got any independent criterion of correctness in the private language problem. He has talked about the public standard of meaning, but then if a private linguist practices a language unique to him and employs some techniques that resemble more or less to the public standard, what would be the status of that language? Another problem that is pertinent is whether one can think independently of language, i.e. whether there is any thought that is independent of language. My take on this is, when a

person thinks, he must be thinking about something, it cannot be an empty thought. Thoughts are structured, even though they are not properly expressed. Thoughts can be said to have a peculiar status before it is expressed by language, probably psycholinguists would go to the extent of giving it an independent status too. People like Fodor would ascribe meaning to the *Mentalese* terms, to say that there is a language of thought. There is something about thought that can sometimes be difficult to be expressed, like I could say to someone, "Okay, you understand my sadness, but have you understood the depth of my feelings? Can you really plumb it?" To some extent, I can claim it like this, but I can never claim that whatever I feel is simply private or unique to myself, therefore I have formed a sort of private language. Private language of this type can be, in principle, known by some other person. This is what *language-game* is all about, this is what philosophical prejudice or philosophical seduction is about Wittgenstein warns us not to fall in the trap of.

The legacy of Wittgenstein lies in his understanding of both the private sensations and the public criteria. He has accepted both to be true, he has not separated them. The way Fodor mischaracterises Wittgenstein in formulating his *language of thought* hypothesis, is his conception of making those distinct from each other. Rather Wittgenstein's take on this

is a more inclusive position. He has given very much importance to the private sensations, but maintained that when a person expresses them in language, sensations are condensed into the grammar and drop out of consideration. It is in this juncture, we believe, Wittgenstein has distinguished himself from the positivist or a more rigorous group of philosophers as well as has been able to move himself out of the quandary of behaviourism or any particular philosophical theory.

We can take the PLA further to be in a state where the problem of the inner can be looked in the glass of the communitarian view. The triumph of the PLA lies in the emancipation from the age-old philosophical concern of privacy in a person's mental life. The practical significance that we can derive from the famous argument is the level of interpersonal communication that has got the foundation of a strong philosophical thesis. In every person there is a private realm, we are not denying this. But the life of an individual is always on the axis of other persons, even other animals too. The individualistic view of language does not stand on a proven track as it lacks the communicative relation between persons. Language, if it is private, has to have some criteria for being so. The 'memory criterion' fails to do the justice to the private language, as has been decisively pointed out by Wittgenstein in *PI* §258. Even if there is an intrapersonal communication or talking to oneself by a monologist, one

cannot claim that there is a language-game involved. There cannot be any private *language-game*, as there cannot be any private rules. Thoughts are also not private entities, they have a potential to be expressed, and when they are expressed, thoughts remain in the eyes of the others. The defined characteristic that we could find in the private language problem is the individual who is not isolated from the rest of the community. He is not a complete being unless he is able to communicate with others, unless he realises that others are also individual human beings just like him, they also have a language which the individual is acquainted with or could be familiar in a discourse. It is about learning language, living in the *form of life*, governed under the rules of language and maintaining the standard or *criterion of correctness*. Wittgenstein says, "You learned the *concept 'pain'* when you learned language."<sup>221</sup>

Learning a language requires skill, and skill is oriented in a social set-up. One has to master the technique or be skilled enough to speak a language as well as convey meaning. The whole issue lies in the use of language. When we talk about the use in our society or community, we cannot preclude the individual. Because the individual is not a secluded being, he has his existence in relation with others. In Wittgenstein's point of

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<sup>221</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), §384.

view, thinking is inescapably social, yet conducted within the first person in a way that would impel the voice of private experience.<sup>222</sup> There is a double-layered personality in man, one of them is public and another is the private. Still, the private sphere of the person wants to move out to the public and yearns for the expression. It looks for the relationship with the public world without affecting its own personality. We can therefore conclude that the self is inherently public and the other is not isolated from the individual self. The self is a corporeal entity in the sense that it is incomplete without its relation with the other selves, or other persons. It would be wise to observe Wittgenstein's vision of language in this view so that our understanding of his philosophy of language never gets bogged down within the parameter of the *Reductio Argument*.

One of the most influential contributions that the PLA has been able to do is its attempt to resolve some of the most dominant confusions in the philosophy of language. What PLA has done is not only significant to the twentieth century philosophy, it still adds to a great extent to the philosophy of mind and language in the ongoing century. It has a practical dimension too as Wittgenstein was dealing with the ordinary language in his discussions of the language and its role in the

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<sup>222</sup> Garry L. Hagberg, *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein, and Autobiographical Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 66.

community. A critique might argue that Wittgenstein's philosophy was inspired by pragmatism, although he was not greatly attached with the writings of C.S. Pierce or John Dewey but had a fair bit of study on William James. But to argue that his arguments conform to the classic pragmatism would be a wrong judgement, rather his arguments have reshaped the pragmatism. It is now cliché to say that his *Investigations* speaks about the meaning in terms of use of the language, the crucial point is that our inward mental processes stand in need of the outward criteria to bring them within the spectrum of the *language-game*.

The inner space of a person is somewhat mystical in nature, only apparently though. The reality banks on the operation of language, how it works, how it systematises our thoughts within the sphere of the interpersonal dealings. It is not about the representations of thought by language, as far as Wittgenstein is concerned, because if the representational role of language is accepted then our sensations or inner space cannot be understood in the technical sense. Therefore, Wittgenstein has sought for a more organisational view of language, as it organises our thoughts into speech in a rule-governed way where an independent criterion plays a crucial part to regulate the use of language. While this is the base of his PLA, he has given primordial importance to the human face, its expressions of the inner sensations. The inner is

connected with the outer and makes the human being as an integrated individual, an individual who is never secluded from the others.

Hence, looking from a birds' eye view on his PLA, we find it as something that incorporates thought into human language, makes a person a public being in spite of his unique existence as an individual, thus establishing that it is language which reveals the mystery of the inner being of a person. PLA depicts about the amalgamation of the individual and the social characters dwelling in a person; it is a momentous achievement in the philosophy of language as it takes the importance of sensations in a manner like never before. It is no longer confined only within the scope of the possibility of a private language, rather it opens a door for the ins and outs between language and thought.

### *The way to go with the PLA: A contemporary perspective*

At the onset of any discussion about the *Private Language Argument*, one has to face the challenge whether there is any possibility of a private language. Since Wittgenstein has given a notion of private language that he later went on to refuse to have any logical possibility, the investigation revolves around the scope of privacy in our language-game. The protocol

language that Carnap has talked about is impossible to communicate to someone else, but according to Wittgenstein, under certain conditions it would be impossible to communicate meaning even to oneself.<sup>223</sup> This is a point that can be worked on to prove that the communication is made not only between different persons, there is communication in a person too. One can communicate her thoughts to herself, retrospect her previous works, and curse herself for her undue advantages in life and so on. Juxtaposed with this, when someone writes something in his diary to record his pain, he is dependent on his memory the moment he has transcribed his sensation. It makes him fallible against the vulnerability of misjudgement of the sensation as memory is not itself an infallible source of knowledge; rather it has to depend on the previous memory to justify the claim of meaning. So, there is an infinite chain of consciousness that never makes the person convinced enough even to oneself to claim the sensation as a private mental object. One is always in the struggle to verify his claim and he fails to communicate to himself, let alone his communication to others. A mechanism that produces meaning is not coherent with the above kind of linguistic communication, since in this case the private sensation does not come under the gamut of *language-game*. What we can learn from the *Investigations* is that communication is not all about conveying meaning to the third person, it

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<sup>223</sup> K.S. Nielsen, *The Evolution of the Private Language Argument*, p. 63.

is about the communication within oneself as well. There is a cognitive platform in a person on which the transportation of meaning first takes place independent of his communication of that meaning to others.

The above point is not made to establish that there is a privacy of language, it is made to clarify that communication takes place within the individual in the same way as interpersonal communication takes place.

The privacy of language is a contingent possibility, it never reaches the edge of total privacy. If sensation is accepted as private, then the grammar of the sensation has to be found by language and once language meets the criteria to explore the grammar, the privacy of sensation is simply compressed into the grammar. Now the essential point we need to address is, which criterion enables me to locate my sensation? The inner is always in need of the outward criteria, but what is actually interesting is Wittgenstein's emphasis on terms like 'use', 'function', 'purpose' etc. The verbal expression of pain also needs to maintain the criterion, and the criterion lies in our use of language. It is the standard of correctness that Wittgenstein is looking for, that is why he gives the expression very much importance, as in §258 of *Philosophical Investigations* he demands for an independent standard of correctness that enables a person to distinguish between *what is right* and *what seems to be right*. Beneath the demand for criteria there are notions of 'use' and

'function', because Wittgenstein gives optimum importance to the ordinary language in his *Investigations* and he takes ordinary language to be meaningful.<sup>224</sup> We think his insistence on the meaningfulness of the ordinary language is one of the most important turning points of the 20<sup>th</sup> century analytic philosophy as it has given him a cult status among his contemporaries as well as the door has been widely opened for other disciplines such as cognitive science or artificial intelligence.

Despite the fact that language is essentially a public or social activity, there are situations when private language does look possible in the human discourse. One such possibility remains with the autistic persons who can apparently look like normal human beings, but their communication effort seems to be different at times. There comes a point which needs to be pondered over. Is language only social in its nature, or beyond that parameter? Because if language has only a social dimension that we normal beings are used to be, then the autistic persons might question its legitimacy. The categorisation of language may need to broaden its span so that we do not claim to be the arbiter of how the language should be used. What I want to point out is that the publicity of language can only more fruitfully be addressed if we accept that language has also a private dimension. Apparently this line of thinking

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

may not represent Wittgenstein's view on language, but as far as his arguments are concerned, I think he would not deny the fact that there is something called sensation that leaves some space for privacy of language. Only thing is, this privacy remains possible to be expressed by means of *language-game*.

Another aspect needs to be addressed is the scope for non-linguistic communication. Communication is broader than language, says William Vicars. Communication can be non-linguistic like gesture, body language, symbol etc. where language is not used to communicate thoughts. Vicars says, "Notice, there is a difference between "language" and "a language." Neurolinguistic psychologists talk about "language." Linguists talk about languages. Cognitive scientists talk about language use. Linguists talk about language features. How you define language depends on your audience."<sup>225</sup> Therefore, we can derive that PLA has a broader significance than just to prove that language is essentially public. Language is what makes communication possible, but all communications are not based on language in their activities. Language is the tool or vehicle by means of which communication is to be achieved, here communication is the aim or destination one wants to reach. Yet, we

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<sup>225</sup> William Vicars, "Nonlinguistic communication", Available online @ [lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-layout/nonlinguisticcommunication.htm](http://lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-layout/nonlinguisticcommunication.htm).

believe, the coercion from communication to language does not limit the scope of language, and it does not either prove that non-linguistic communications are private in character. Gesture, body language, sighing, posturing – these are activities that have a public sphere, because they are there to communicate one's feelings and thoughts, so being non-linguistic does not necessarily follow to be private. Had it been so, communication would have been impossible to be made, since there would not be any use of non-linguistic activities. Again we are talking about the relevance of Wittgenstein's notion of 'use' as everything we accommodate in our communication must have a use in society.

Let us look at the other side of language. In each of us private language resides as a register which can never be fully understood. A self-conscious activity continues to play in a human mind that others are not able to measure. When someone carries out suicide there is an overabundance of disgraceful signifiers that cannot be processed through the existing resources of the self.<sup>226</sup> A suicide may be an outcome of an accumulation of misrecognitions, where the self is shattered with a sense of both individual history and future prospect. There is a great remoteness in the mode of thinking between the suicide agent or victim

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<sup>226</sup> Henry Sussman, "Maxima Moralia: Millennial Fragments on the Public and Private Dimensions of Language", *MLN* 110.4: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 856. Web source: [muse.jhu.edu/journals/mln/v110/110.4sussman.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mln/v110/110.4sussman.html).

and the rest of us, because the incident marks the place of the non-adjustment of circumstances and conditions we could endure, but unbearable to the agent who commits suicide. It is a question of alternative whether to remain alive in those circumstances or not. This is what differentiates between Wittgenstein's concept of a social language and the idiosyncratic, singular language.<sup>227</sup> There is strangeness in this sort of personal language.

The categories like suicide, bodies, sexuality and various ethnic, national categories are social factors, but on the other hand they have appeal something unique to us. Suicide may be seen as an instrument of conceptualising our singularity. Thinking about suicide is nothing appallingly dramatic, because thinking about it does not presume to commit the act of suicide.<sup>228</sup> Every self enjoys more or less established patterns of behaviour and thought. Some circumstances or conditions may be unfavourable for upbringing and other social stages, yet the instability of the self is understood in comparison to the relative tolerance of a formed system.<sup>229</sup> These inconsistent selves have the potential of great intellectuals, artists or social reformers, yet their achievement bears the disgrace of moral suspicion and futile responsibility. This is a bitter

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 857.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

truth of life that can hardly be ignored. Even if the person is socialised, his experiences are not always easily communicated due to the tinge and torque that the self's private language consists of. If there is any private language at all, that would look like this. Privacy, although it does not form the basis of language, consists some of the basic tenets of a human being. The individual is not hidden from others, but his existence has a private realm; it may not be secret all the way, but it moulds the personality either to positive or negative direction.

We have a corporeal body which is subject to the laws of physics. But at the same time we experience ourselves, our mental affairs, achievements, failures, desolation in a way that inflames us to hypothesise a corresponding, non-physical complement. The author of an autobiography very often faces the challenge of revealing some of his truths to the readers as it may damage his image in the public life. On the other hand, he has to decide how much he can conceal from the public; otherwise his autobiography might look very dull and unworthy of reading with enthusiasm. It incorporates a dimension of our being, which can never be tackled in principle with the instruments and the formal logic of science.<sup>230</sup> Nor can it be traced by making the soul a module of self-awareness or experiencing ourselves through

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<sup>230</sup> Sam Vaknin, 'The Basic Dilemma of the Artist'. Web source: [samvak.tripod.com](http://samvak.tripod.com).

introspection as rightly suggested by Wittgenstein. We have emotions, love, fear, anguish, desire and each one of us forms and develops an idiosyncratic, unique emotional language; and there is a universal, natural language. How can we link the lingual space? Again we have to look for a solution by means of language.

We face a dilemma in closing the gulf between the original experience and its representation. Fodor turns this problem into conceptualising his *language of thought*. He makes it clear that learning the first language essentially involves the use of an unlearned internal representational system.<sup>231</sup> This line of thinking may inspire non-linguistic or paralinguistic theories to some extent, but there is so many disputes in that way. Wittgenstein formulates a picture of public language that is governed by the conventions of the speech community. Fodor observes that these conventions relate the public language terms to paradigm public situations. But this sort of model picture may not always be right due to the propositional attitudes like beliefs since my verbalisations are determined not just by my intentions but also by my beliefs.<sup>232</sup> Still, the issue is so complex that propositional attitudes are not enough to establish a private language, and we cannot but accept that the main

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<sup>231</sup> J. A. Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) p. 79.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

function of language is to communicate our thoughts no matter how much the individual is able to really express his situations. Hence the possibility of the private language still looks distant in the exclusive sense of the term.

Coming back to the issue of lingual gap between our idiosyncratic, private languages and the universal language, we can look for help from the artists in mediating between us and their experience. The artist also has a reference group, his audience, to assess the aloofness between the original experience and its representation. There is a parallel podium between the artist and the audience; otherwise the appraisal of the art would not have been possible. In spite of this, the audience cannot totally claim to grasp the intention of the artist, as there must be something exclusive that the artist might have thought before painting the objet d'art. Therefore, even if language is a robust tool for social communication, the possibility of its having private dimensions cannot be denied. In hindsight, these dimensions make the debate on private language argument more tempting and hence we need to look into the matter in a contemporary perspective from art and aesthetic point of view also.

There is a huge range of possibilities with regard to the PLA, of which we could critically discuss only a very short part perhaps. Since the issue is multifaceted and so many philosophers have given their viewpoints, the literature related to the problem also consists of a large area. It was very difficult to give a radical conclusion regarding the problem, as being radical or fundamental does not do justice to philosophical researches. Despite this, my attempt was to explore the genius of the argument and thereby doing justice to what Wittgenstein has said in the *preface* of the *Philosophical Investigations* that he expects it to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own. It has really stimulated and brainstormed my thoughts to the extent that I could find new highways to deal with the problem. I humbly submit that I could touch upon some key areas, while leaving many that I would like to develop in future in some form or other. Delving into the issue has inspired me a lot and opened a new door to the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Finally, I can say that after a thoroughly careful and critical study of the private language argument, it is very difficult to deny Wittgenstein's position. If we deny his position, then the problem of other minds would look more complicated. It is also not possible to establish an essentially viable private language, as it would violate the rules of the language-game and it would then be impossible to communicate our thoughts.

Rather, public language can be said to have a private dimension in the form of art and aesthetic works. Even in these instances, the consciousness of an artist or author is not isolated from the public stage-setting. Seeing from a broader and more practical point of view, the PLA can have a greater importance in developing the communication skill and techniques of the individuals as well as it could help autistic persons to develop their vocabulary by following the rules of language that could be set up to their own advantage and patterns of behaviour. Wittgenstein's thoughts could be applied to develop the communication skill of the persons of different genres and differently minded human beings. The use of language is what depicts the *Investigations* and there is nothing better than to apply the 'use' in our society or 'form of life' even to bridge the communication gap between persons and enable us to live a better public life.

From a theoretical point of view, the language is nothing but ultimately social. It is an institution in which the society is governed in a systematic way. The private life of the individual is there, but the scope of language is much broader. Private language cannot be accepted in the core sense of the term. The use of language is what Wittgenstein promotes in his *Philosophical Investigations* and the PLA is the soul of this view. The main target is to construct the relation between language and thought, and

since memory cannot be the *criterion of correctness* as described in *PI* §258 due to its fallibility, there needs to have a public and independent criterion that would check whether language has been properly used to convey meaning or not. Psycholinguists would probably have a different outlook, but in the context of meaning Wittgenstein's position still looks better poised. PLA testifies to the fact that there is an integrated relationship between language, thought and meaning and the total system is governed by a public set of rules.