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**WITTGENSTEIN'S "PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT" AND THE
ISSUE OF GOD'S OMNISCIENCE**

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Abstract: In his "private language argument," Wittgenstein argues that the notion of a private language, a language that it is logically impossible for anyone other than the language user themselves to understand, is incoherent. For example, it is sometimes claimed that since no one but oneself can be directly aware of one's own sensations, everyone speaks their own private sensation language that cannot be understood by others. Wittgenstein argues that this is an illusion because, since there are no objective standards for what one means by the words in one's private language, those words have no meaning at all, not even for oneself. After presenting a summary of the private language argument, and explaining Wittgenstein's crucial distinction between criteria and symptoms, the paper argues that Wittgenstein's own *prima facie* religious beliefs about God provide a counterexample to his private language argument - which shows that it is fallacious. The paper then considers whether Wittgenstein's striking remark that even if God looked into our minds he would not be able to see what we are thinking about enables him to escape this criticism and argues that it does not. Finally, the paper shows how the present interpretation of Wittgenstein's private language argument is different from Kripke's interpretation, with which it is superficially similar in some respects, and sketches a positive model of how an omniscient God can know the truth about N's private use of words. Wittgenstein's elusive notion of God is illuminated in the course of the exposition.

Key words: Wittgenstein, private language, metaphysics, criteria/symptoms, concept of God.

He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts." - Luke 16:15

In his "Private Language Argument", Wittgenstein argues that the notion of a private language, e.g., Wittgenstein's hypothetical private sensation language that can only, as a matter of logic, be understood by himself, is incoherent. Wittgenstein claims that since, *ex hypothesi*, there can be no public criteria for judging whether his private words are being used correctly, "whatever is going to seem right to me is right" (*Philosophical Investigations* 258). That is, there is no such thing as a right or wrong use of words in a private language. However, Wittgenstein's own *prima facie* religious beliefs undermine his conclusion. In his "Lectures on Ethics" (42), he tacitly endorses the view that God is omniscient. Wittgenstein's remarks on God are notoriously obscure, but his "private language argument" does not seem to square with his tacit acceptance of an omniscient God who could, presumably, know whether one is using one's private words correctly or not. That is, an omniscient God's knowledge constitutes a standard for "talking about right" in the case of private languages whether human beings can access that standard or not.

One might think this is mistaken because Wittgenstein's "private language argument" takes for granted that human language is restricted to human capacities. This is true but that is the problem. For this means it begs the question against metaphysical or theological views concerning language. Indeed, this explains why it never seems to occur to him that his own *prima facie* religious beliefs undermine his view that there can be *no objective truth* about one's private thoughts. For if God can know these private truths, the conclusion of his private language argument is false. But if God cannot know these private facts, then God is not omniscient. Which is it? Although the logic is complicated here, disentangling these threads sheds new light on the real nature of Wittgenstein's private language argument and it also clarifies Wittgenstein's elusive concept of God.

§ I explains the "private language argument." § II explains Wittgenstein's crucial distinction between criteria and symptoms. § III argues that Wittgenstein's own views about God's omniscience expose the fallacy in his "private language argument." § IV explains how Wittgenstein's intriguing remark at *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 217) that even if God looked into our minds he could not see what we are thinking does not contradict the view of the present paper. § V distinguishes the present interpretation from Kripke's views on private languages and sketches a *positive* model of how an omniscient God can know the truth about someone's private thoughts – concretely illustrating why the "private language argument" is fallacious.

1. Summary of Wittgenstein's "Private Language Argument"

Wittgenstein's fundamental point is that ...in a putative private language ... there is ...no check on whether the words which only I (the speaker) understand are being employed [correctly] because [I] only [have] an impression of constancy to go on, which does not entail that any rule is being consistently followed - McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (48)

An ordinary person Sara's color-language is not a private language because she resides in a public community that speaks a color-language. One only posits a private language when Sara is held to have direct acquaintance with objects private to herself, e.g., although Sara is *directly* aware of her own toothache, her friend Mark can only know of her toothache *indirectly*: "We spoke of 'a private language.' We might say: 'Even if no one knows what I call 'toothache', at least I know'" (Wittgenstein, "The Language of Sense Data and Private Experience," 295).

Although there is disagreement about how to represent Wittgenstein's "private language argument", the following passage, *Philosophical Investigations* (258), is *universally* regarded as *stating the essential core of that argument* (Kripke, 1982, 3, 24, 101; Malcolm, 1986, 158; McGinn, M., 2017, 155), „I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign "S" and write a sign in a calendar for every day [when] I have [it] ... I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition [of "S"]. ... I speak or write the sign down, and ... concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of the sign. Well, this is done by [concentrating] my attention; for in this way I impress upon myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. But "I impress it on myself" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in the future. But ... I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right".

Wittgenstein's objection to this argument is that concentrating on the connection between the sensation and its description does *not* establish a *criterion* for the "right" use of the sign. If his memory is faulty about which sensation he named "S", he has no criterion for determining that his memory is incorrect. He could appeal to other memories, but that would be like looking at one copy of the newspaper to verify what is in another copy of the same newspaper (*Philosophical Investigations* 265). This problem does *not* arise for public languages. Suppose Wittgenstein names a red patch "R" and decides to record in his diary every time he sees that colour again. If a member of his community observes him record an "R" in his diary upon seeing a blue patch, they can correct him. The possibility of this kind of *independent* check is what his private sensation-language

lacks: "The balance on which impressions are to be weighed is not the impression of a balance" (*Philosophical Investigations* 259). One's private memory is only the "impression" of a criterion. Since a genuine language requires genuine criteria for the correct use of words, and since a private language does not have them, "private languages" are not genuine languages. This means that those private words do not have any meaning even for the private language user!

2. The Need for Public Criteria

An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria. -
Philosophical Investigations (580).

Wittgenstein does not deny that there are inner processes: "And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them" (*Philosophical Investigations* 308). He does not hold that to say that someone has a mental state is *only* to say that they *behave* in a certain way. He only requires that there are "criteria" for the *expression* of "inner" states in public behaviour (*Philosophical Investigations* 21, 146, 285, 536, pp. 210-211; Malcolm 1986, Chap. 8).

The closest Wittgenstein comes to a definition of "criteria" is in the *Blue and Brown Books* where he suggests that the criterion for Sara's being in a certain mental state is either the sufficient conditions or the necessary and sufficient conditions for her being in that state (Albritton 1966, 234-5). However, Wittgenstein abandons the idea of necessary and sufficient conditions in the *Philosophical Investigations* where a criterion for Sara's being in a mental state is understood as that by the presence of which someone is *justified* in saying of Sara that she is in that state or by the absence of which one is justified in saying of Sara that she is not in that state. The "semantic ascent" (Quine 2013, 249ff) from criteria for X's being F to criteria that *justify* one in saying that X is F is a crucial difference. These "criteria" must also be enshrined in the *grammar* of the language and be applied in appropriate *circumstances*, e.g., the criterion of Sara's having a toothache is, very roughly, that she holds her jaw and moans (*Philosophical Investigations*, 117, 164, 349). If Sara exhibits the right sort of behavior according to the grammar of the language and she is in the right circumstances (e.g., real life rather than a play in which her character has a toothache), one is *justified* in saying that she has a toothache.

Wittgenstein contrasts *criteria* with *symptoms*. For Wittgenstein, a *symptom* of Sara's being in a mental state is something learned by *experience* to be *correlated* with that state. Wittgenstein gives the example of an observed correlation between sensation S and a rise in one's blood pressure as a "useful" *symptom* of someone's having sensation S (*Philosophical Investigations* 270). Thus, one might know as a result of experience

that Sara has a toothache by observing the rise in Sara's blood pressure. Whereas the criteria for the use of a word determine the *meaning* of the word, a symptom is only *contingently correlated* with that sensation. Scientists will look for the *symptoms* of Lyme disease, and regard the presence of those symptoms as satisfying the scientific *standards* for saying that someone has Lyme disease, but in order to look for the symptoms of Lyme disease, one must, in order even to know what to look for, *already* understand the *criteria* for applying the expression "Lyme disease". Criteria concern the *meaning* of the expression. *Standards* have to do with the *symptoms contingently* connected with the state denoted by the expression.

3. The Problem of an Omniscient God

"Life can educate one to a belief in God." - *Culture and Value* (86)

Wittgenstein develops his "private language argument" by reference to the capacities of the purported private language users. However, the private language argument gives no reason whatsoever why objective *standards* for the right use of private words can only be supplied by human beings. Since God has traditionally been invoked as an objective guarantor of truth, the private language argument cannot show that there are no objective standards about Sara's private uses of words unless it also shows that God cannot know about her private states. This objection would not bother Putnam (1981, 69-72, 74, 124), who is sympathetic to Wittgenstein's "private language argument" but rejects the notion of a "God's Eye" point of view on reality. For Wittgenstein, however, who appears to believe in God (McDonough 2016), one cannot escape this difficulty so easily. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein never says much about his concept of God. At *Tractatus* (6.342) and *Culture and Value* (72, 86-87) Wittgenstein suggests that he believes in God *in some sense*. But in what sense? In the Forward to his *Philosophical Remarks* he states that he would like to say that the book "is written to the glory of God" but does not because "nowadays that ... would not be rightly understood." This reticence is found throughout his works. The paper does purport to resolve this interpretative issue but is concerned only with the question whether his "private language argument" is consistent with his *prima facie* belief in an omniscient God.

Wittgenstein addresses the issue of God's omniscience in his *Lectures on Ethics* (42), "[W]hen we speak of God or say that he sees everything ... all our terms and actions seem to be part of a great elaborate allegory ... [which] describes the experiences I have just referred to."

The experiences to which he refers concern various *absolutes*, absolute safety, absolute knowledge and absolute value. Wittgenstein links religious beliefs to the descriptions religious people give of their experiences of such absolutes. These religious allegories take one to the paradoxical limits of language, but he does not reject them (*Lecture on*

Ethics, 43). He has the deepest respect for such religious views (*Lectures on Ethics*, 44). Thus, he does not reject the view that God is omniscient. He only rejects the misguided attempts by philosophers to employ such theological views to create a mythology of "queer [seltsame]" facts (*Philosophical Investigations* 195-196, 363, 428; pp. 200, 215; *Zettel*, 553, 661; *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, IV. 9, 18; *On Certainty*, 6), for example, the alleged "fact" of the matter concerning whether "7777" occurs in the expansion of π or the alleged "queer" "facts" about private sensations.

Recall Wittgenstein's remark that "philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather I [sometimes] abandon a certain combination of words as senseless" (*Big Typescript*, 161). Philosophy does *not* lead Wittgenstein to "renounce" religious views. For Wittgenstein, the grounds for or against religious beliefs are not to be found in the library. He admits that he might abandon certain religious views as "senseless", by which he means that he might abandon them if he does not see any *use* for them, but it is *life*, not philosophical argument, that is determinative here (see epigraph above). Thus, Wittgenstein holds that certain religious views do have a certain role, admittedly sometimes paradoxical, in human life. Since his *Lecture on Ethics* (42-43) implies that the view that God is omniscient is *not* one of these useless views, Wittgenstein's "private language argument" still faces the objection that his omniscient God can know the truth about Sara's private pains. For even if "we" mortals cannot understand Sara's private language, *God can*. Thus, we can "talk about right" in these kinds of cases, *specifically, the "right" that an omniscient God enjoys concerning private states* - which implies that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" is fallacious.

Indeed, Wittgenstein elsewhere admits that God can understand private messages in someone's mind: "'You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed'.—That is a grammatical comment" (*Zettel*, 717). When God speaks to Abraham, the message is private in the sense that no human being besides Abraham can understand it. But God can understand it. Indeed, for Wittgenstein, it is a grammatical truth that divine communications are private to the person addressed. But if God can understand Abraham's private divine messages, why cannot God understand Sara's private sensation language? Wittgenstein's "private language argument" contradicts his own *prima facie* religious beliefs.

One might try to escape this objection by restricting the concepts concerning language to human beings - which is effectively what Wittgenstein does. Since, however, he tacitly endorses the existence of an omniscient God, he is committed to the view that there *can* be objective truth about our private experiences. It is surprising that more scholars have not asked how someone who *prima facie* believes in God can hold that

there are no standards at all about one's private thoughts. For God's knowledge *just is* such a standard.

Second, Wittgenstein's statement that "there is no such thing as a right and a wrong use of words in a private language" is a too strong. Although he only argues that there cannot be *criteria* for the right use of private words, he claims that there are no right and wrong *standards* at all! Whereas a criterial connection is a "logical" connection that concerns the meaning of the word (e.g., "squirrel" *means* four footed arboreal mammal), a *standard* involves what is *contingently* connected with the application of words (e.g., a squirrel's blood pH is 7.4). Why cannot there be objective *standards* referencing the *symptoms* of mental states for the right use of private words as Wittgenstein suggests at *Philosophical Investigations* (270)? That is, why cannot God have sufficient knowledge of the *symptoms* of Sara's sensations to know that she has sensation S – once again, meaning that there *is* an objective standard about her private states after all.

4. Does Wittgenstein Deny God's Omniscience?

"If God had looked into our minds he would not have been able to see there who we were thinking of." –Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 217)

Perhaps Wittgenstein can escape this objection by taking back his endorsement of God's omniscience? The point of the remark in the above epigraph seems to be that even if God *directly* sees everything in Sara's private consciousness, God still cannot know what Sara means by her private words—which seems to deny God's omniscience. Call this Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark"! Further, Wittgenstein might *appear* to disparage the idea of God's omniscience elsewhere. *Philosophical Investigations* (352) refers to a "queer" argument invoked in mathematics: "In the decimal expansion of π either the group "7777" occurs, or it does not—there is no third possibility.' That is to say: 'God sees, but we don't know'". Clearly he is not here endorsing God's omniscience. The point is rather that the view that God knows everything is invoked in a "queer" argument that is the source of much mischief in philosophy. He returns to this theme of divine superhuman consciousness at *Philosophical Investigations* (426), „The form of expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know; he sees the whole of each of those infinite series and sees into human consciousness. For us ... these forms of expression are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose."

Note, however, that this last passage does *not* deny God's omniscience. The passage is entirely *human-centred*. It even suggests that "a" god might be able to understand what we cannot ("The form of expression ... seems to have been designed for a god"). The point here, as at *Philosophical Investigations* (352), is that we human beings do not know how to use certain suggestive theological expressions, but these passages are about human limitations, not about God.

Similarly, Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" does *not* really, when read carefully, undermine the view that he accepts the idea of an omniscient God. In order to see why, recall Kripke's (1982 39-41, 143) interpretation of the "private language argument" that there is "no fact of the matter" about what Sara privately means by her words. For, if, as Kripke suggests, there is no fact of the matter about what Sara privately means, then, since even an omniscient God cannot know facts that don't exist, God's omniscience is not challenged if there are no private mental facts for God to know. On this quasi-Kripkean view, these passages do not undermine the view that God is omniscient because God's omniscience is not challenged by the fact that She (God) cannot know "facts" that don't exist. For even if God looks *directly* into human minds, there are no private facts there for Her to know.

Note also that Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" does *not* say that God cannot know who or what we are thinking of. It states only that God cannot know who or what we are thinking of *by looking directly into our minds!* It does *not* claim that God cannot know everything, including the facts about Sara's mental states, *in some other way*. In order to see this, recall Wittgenstein's attempt to establish his private language: He *publicly* resolves to write "S" down in his diary every time he has sensation S. God can observe this public act. Since, in addition, following Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark", She can look directly into his mind and observe both the sensation S in his mind and his private words "Here is sensation S again". Thus, She can directly observe the *correlation* between sensation S in Wittgenstein's mind, his private utterings of the words "Here is sensation S again," and his writing "S" in his public diary. Given Her *perfect* knowledge of his private states and public behaviour, She *can* verify the *correlations* between his private states and public behavior, which means there *is* a right answer about his private uses of words after. Note that *nothing* in the "private language argument" rules out this possibility.

One might think this forgets that Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" denies that God can observe this correlation. But that is *not* what the passage denies. Candlish (2014 § 3.3) correctly distinguishes between remembering the *meaning* of the sign "S" and being able to "apply the word "S" only to S's in future" and argues that *Philosophical Investigations* (258) only requires the former (that the private-language user must be able to remember the *meaning* of the sign "S"). Given this distinction,

Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" does *not* deny that God can directly verify what private sensations Wittgenstein has or what private words he uses. It only denies the *specific* claim that God can know the alleged *meaning-connection* between S and "S" by looking *directly* into Wittgenstein's mind. It does *not* deny that God can know the *correlations* between Wittgenstein's private and public states, thereby verifying that Wittgenstein is *correctly* reapplying his private word "S" to instances of S in the future!

Similarly, Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" does *not* deny that God can know the same *public* meaning-relationship between S and "S" that ordinary language-users understand. Recall from § II that this passage does not claim that the meaning-relationship itself is mysterious. It only claims that the notion of a *private* meaning-relation is incoherent. Contra Kripke (1982), Wittgenstein has no problem with the view that words are meaningful (Malcolm 1986, Chap. 9; Werhane 1987 253; McDonough 1991). Although some philosopher's think a proposition is something "queer", Wittgenstein sees it as "the most ordinary thing in the world" (PI, 93). Since "God's direct access remark" does *not* contradict the *positive* moral of the "private language argument" that inner phenomenon must have public criteria, Wittgenstein does not deny that a public word can "mean" an "inner" sensation S (See § II). Thus, Wittgenstein need not deny that God can know our inner states in much the same way that we can know that a dog is in pain (Cf. Bloor 1983, 72) - by observing the dog's outer behavior.

Wittgenstein makes an analogous point at *Zettel* (606): "The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult [*Okkultes*]". Just as *Zettel* (606) does *not* claim that thinking is mysterious, but only that thinking "enclosed" in the head, is mysterious, Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" does not claim that thought is mysterious, but only that thought or meaning conceived to be *enclosed within the private consciousness* is mysterious. That is, Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" only claims that God cannot know the "occult" meaning-relationship required by the notion of a private language!

One can make a similar point about Wittgenstein's *prima facie* critique of the appeal to God's omniscience in mathematics at *Philosophical Investigations* (352). Consider the related passage at *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (IV. 34), „So God, who knows everything, knows whether [humans] will have reached '777' [in the expansion of π] by the end of the world. But can his *omniscience* decide whether they *would* have reached it after the end of the world? ... Even for [God] the mere rule of expansion cannot decide anything it cannot decide for us [all emphasis LW's]."

Prima facie, this passage *affirms* God's omniscience about mathematical truth ["Can his *omniscience* ...?"]. What Wittgenstein objects to in

these passages is the view that the grounds for such mathematical truths are *already there independently of human calculation*. His view is that if human beings have not yet calculated that "777" occurs in the expansion of π , then the answer to that question is not determined yet. But if the answer to that question is not determined yet, there is not yet any fact of the matter about whether "777" occurs in the expansion of π . But if there is not yet any fact of the matter about whether "777" occurs in the expansion of π , God's omniscience is not undermined by the fact that She does not know this. Thus, what Wittgenstein objects to in *Philosophical Investigations* (352) and *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (IV. 34) is not God's omniscience, but, rather, the sort of "queer" arguments philosophers make that "conjure" "queer" facts that are not really facts (*Philosophical Investigations*, 308). Wittgenstein's ire in these passages is not directed at God's omniscience but against the "occult" facts produced by the "queer" arguments he sees as a standing occupational hazard in philosophy. Once the philosopher produces such a "myth of [our] symbolism" (Zettel, 211), it can appear that there are mysterious facts that mere mortals, and perhaps even God, cannot know. However, "The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there is something one *couldn't* [LW's emphasis] do" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 374). For if these "queer" facts about alleged private meaning-connections or certain sequences in the uncalculated parts of infinite mathematical expansions are fictions, then there is nothing that God "*couldn't*" do. Since these passages do not challenge God's omniscience, one cannot invoke them to save the "private language argument" from the objection that God can know private truths. Wittgenstein is, therefore, still committed by his views about God's omniscience to views that contradict his "private language argument".

5. "Superlative Facts" vs. Mundane Human Standards

"Sometimes when I have contemplated the situation, I have had ... an eerie feeling ...that there is something in my mind ... that *instructs* me what I ought to do in all future cases. ... But ... [nothing] in my mind [could do that]. It seems the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air." – Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (21-22)

One might argue that the argument in the previous section, which parallels Kripke's argument *in certain respects*, saves God's omniscience, thereby saving the key premise in the argument in § III that the private language argument is fallacious, but that, at the same time, it undermines that critique. For the peculiar quasi-Kripkean way it saves God's omniscience, by denying that there is a *fact* about Sara's private states, undermines the conclusion in § III that an omniscient God *can* know the truth

about Sara's private language. For if there is no fact of the matter about what Sara privately means, then there are no facts about a private sensation-language for an omniscient God to know. Thus, if the argument of the previous section is correct, the "private language argument" is right after all that there are no objective standards concerning Sara's private thoughts because there are no private facts to which those objective standards might apply! So is it, as argued in § III, that since God is omniscient, there *is* a fact of the matter about Sara's thoughts, which means that the "private language argument" is fallacious, or is it that, as argued in § IV, there are no private facts, which means that the "private language argument" is not contradicted by God's omniscience? Resolving this dilemma sheds light both on the complex structure of Wittgenstein's "private language argument" and on his notion of God's powers. It also enables one to identify the precise point at which the present paper agrees, and the point at which it disagrees, with Kripke's interpretation.

Unfortunately, Kripke makes a fallacious inference. After attempting, but failing, to find a private mental fact that determines what "S" means, Kripke infers that "the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air." On this basis, Kripke (1982, 66-68, 86) proposes his "sceptical solution" to the "problem" of meaning, namely, that although there are no *facts* that determine what words mean, there are circumstances in which one is justified to assert that "a" means "b".

The fallacy is that Kripke infers from the proposition that there are no "facts" in "my" mind that "*instruct me*" how I "ought to [use words] in all future cases" to the conclusion that there are *no facts at all* about what he means by a word. For the mental "fact" Kripke describes here is no ordinary kind of "fact". It is what Wittgenstein calls a "superlative fact" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 192) of the sort that philosophers "conjure" to explain puzzling phenomenon. Goldberg (1968) calls this particular "superlative fact" a "meaning terminus". McDonough (1986, Chap. VI; McDonough, 1994) calls it a "meaning locus" and "interpretation terminus". Malcolm (1977, 56, 124, 138-140; 1986, 67, 76-77, 81-82, 100-102) remarks that this superlative mental fact would have to "intrinsically and unambiguously" represent what it is about, but that is an impossible "magic" power (*Blue Book*, 172; Malcolm, 1977, 161-162, 242-244; 1986, 111-116; Bloor, 1983, 20; Goldberg, 1983). Instead of inferring that his words have no meaning from the fact that he can find no "superlative facts" in his mind, what Kripke *should* have inferred is that *meaning does not require superlative facts*. Thus, when Wittgenstein's "God's direct access remark" states that God can look directly into Sara's mind and not see what Sara is thinking of, he is merely stating that there are no *superlative facts* in Sara's mind that magically *show* what she means, for that is what would have to be there if God could see what Sara is thinking of *by looking directly into her mind!*

This is why Kripke is wrong that Wittgenstein is a radical sceptic about meaning (Baker and Hacker 1984, 407ff; Goldfarb, 1985; Malcolm, 1986, Chap. 9; McDonough, 1989, 18-20 and 1991, 84-88). Kripke confuses the rejection of magical meaning-determining facts with the denial that there can be mundane facts that determine, for practical human purposes, what words means. This reconciles the critique of Wittgenstein's "private language argument" in § III with the argument in § IV that there are no meaning-determining facts in the private consciousness. For the present result means that there *can* be a factual basis for linguistic meaning in the *mundane* non-superlative facts of human existence that can be known both to God and human beings.

Recall in this connection from § IV that an omniscient God can verify the correlations between Wittgenstein's private utterances and his public behaviour of writing "S" in his diary every time he has sensation S. An omniscient God can also see what brain and sensory and bodily states Wittgenstein is in on all the relevant occasions. This is more than sufficient for an omniscient God to decide whether Wittgenstein correctly writes "S" in his diary every time he has sensation S—which means that there is a right and a wrong about Wittgenstein's private states after all – showing that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" is fallacious. If one still resists this conclusion, one should ask oneself two questions. First, how would a theist respond to the view of "private language argument" that there is no objective truth about Wittgenstein's private states, and, second, what if this theist is Wittgenstein himself? The present paper asks precisely these two questions and argues that the view that there is an omniscient God, which Wittgenstein tacitly accepts, is incompatible with the conclusion of the "private language argument". This means that the "private language" argument is fallacious and also sheds light on Wittgenstein's elusive concept of God in the process.

It is understandable that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" focuses entirely on *criteria* for private states, rather than the possibility of non-criterial standards for the ascription of private states, because Wittgenstein is interested in what people *mean* when they refer to mental states, and he sees meaning as determined by *grammatical criteria*, not symptoms. But this exposes the unjustified leap made in his "private language argument". *Wittgenstein's preoccupation with questions about meaning gets conflated with question about objective standards generally.* For his "private language argument" *does not even raise the issue whether* there can be scientific or divine standards that determine whether Wittgenstein uses his private words correctly. Thus, one cannot legitimately infer from the fact that there are no grammatical criteria for the claim that Wittgenstein correctly uses his private words to the view that there are no objective standards at all about the matter. For if an omniscient God can know the *symptoms* of the fact that Wittgenstein is using his "inner" words correctly, then there *is* a right and a wrong here. The "private language

argument" is fallacious. Further, although one might think that argument undermines the view that God is omniscient, by shielding private mental states from God's knowledge (as might be suggested by *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 217), it does not do so. Wittgenstein's tacit acceptance of God's omniscience is not undermined by his "private language argument". This is only to be expected. For a philosopher who implies that philosophers cannot state any kind of thesis (*Philosophical Investigations*, 128) cannot consistently state any theological theses either. Further, an interesting aspect of Wittgenstein's view of God's knowledge of human mental states is clarified in the process, namely, that God can know about these mental states much as we mere mortals do, either by knowing the behavioural criteria for ascribing mental states to someone, or, as scientists do, by knowing the *symptoms* of someone's behaviour.

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