THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF

Özel Dil Argümanı ve Ben'in Sosyal Oluşumu

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Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence
by means of language
Wittgenstein

ÖZET

Özel dil argümanına göre, sadece bir kişinin anlayabileceği bir dilin varlığı düşünülemeyeceğinden, bir kelimenin anlamı dilin toplumsal kullanımında ortaya çıkar. Bu manada Descartes'in "düşünüyorsam varım" argümanında ortaya koymuş olduğu yöntemle bilgi ve anlam temellendirilemez. Dolayısıyla birey, özgürlüğünü ve benliğini salt kendinden hareket ederek değil, içinde var olduğu toplumun norm, değer ve kurallarına göre oluşturur. Bu husus dilin sosyal sunumunda ve kullanımında mevcuttur. Bu manada toplum rasyonel bireyler tarafından oluşturulmaz, rasyonel bireyler toplumun içinde var olurlar. Yeni anlam dünyası ve bilimsel paradigmalar, yeni ortak kavrayışlara bağlı olarak gelenek içinde oluşur.

Anahar Kelimeler: Özel Dil, Cogito Argümanı, Anlam, Paradigma

ABSTRACT

The private language argument contends that knowledge cannot be constructed upon a private sense or language which is sensible and knowable to only one person as the self. As contrary to the Cogito argument, it puts the public use of language as the basis of science, knowledge, communication and meaning. In the community, there are interpersonal relations as norms. The self as a person has access to his mental states by means of the public language that he or she speaks. The intentions, thoughts and feelings that make self free are acquired through the practice of public criticism in the moral community. Indeed, the rational self or a rational individual is formed through communities, not vice versa. That is to say that the human world is socially constructed in many ways.

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INTRODUCTION
I

The self, as the starting point of metaphysics, is the mere anchor of epistemology, and it is the place from where tacit knowledge is derived by the Cogito argument that Descartes employed. By using the method of hyperbolic doubt, Descartes intends to construct an epistemology that contends to introduce 'clear and distinct ideas' which are captured by the intellect. Truth, for Descartes, having the attributes of clearness and distinctness gives a criterion that distinguishes true ideas from false ones. Accordingly clear and distinct ideas lead to true conclusions (Descartes, 1993 [1641]).

Given these mentioned remarks, Descartes tend to prove the existence of God. Here my concern is not to explain his argument in details but to understand his strategy so as to show how it relates to Wittgenstein's "private language argument". Descartes begins with a subjective sphere where he establishes his own existence upon which the proof of the existence of God rests. Since God, by his nature, would not deceive us, then the world is as it is seemed. As the Cogito argument puts, as he thinks and thus as he exists, God also exists. This is the main basis upon which it is possible to construct the objective world. This argument leads to the epistemological position known as 'foundationalism' which tends to justify beliefs upon some indubitable foundations. The basis of all the other's knowledge, then, is derived from a 'first-person's true beliefs. Descartes, to put the argument, made a journey to proof God's existence.

According to the Cartesian, mental states are private in the sense that only the person who has them can know their reality. It implies that mental states are not public since they are, as being 'private objects' or 'private entities', accessible to only one person. Descartes' this problematic theory has caused a series of modern 'anti-Cartesian' arguments, among which Wittgenstein's private language argument is most famous. It is not an argument that is constructed only against the Cartesian theory of the mind. Rather it has many implications and direct effects on the contemporary social and moral philosophy as much as on the philosophy of science.

II

The problem of privacy stating whether there can be a private language has been widely discussed as one of the most outstanding one among others. This is very much related to the problem of meaning of words. In this paper, the private language argument within the frame of Wittgenstein's later philosophy which was scattered among sections 243 to 351 of the *Philosophical Investigations* is analyzed and discussed. Although the questions that he has dealt with through his philosophical adventure remain the same, his response to these questions differ radically through his two magnum opera, namely, in *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigation* due to the radical change of his perception of philosophical problems.

Some of the questions he has dealt with are the following: What is the meaning of a word? In what sense do words have meaning? What is the relation between words?

Wittgenstein's account of private language argument has two main dimensions. In the first one he goes on to conclude justifications. Secondly, language is a framework conceived as a communal activity. This dual structure of language leads Wittgenstein to investigate about the status of private language problem which is about the possibility of whether there can be a language in which a person communicates with himself and no one else can understand this language. In the case of such a possibility, the assertion for a common argument could be falsified. He states this as follows:

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in the form of life (Wittgenstein, 1953: prop. 241).

Wittgenstein has evaluated this problem in terms of two different aspects. His first discussion is concerned with whether we may have some actual private languages. In order to clearly explicate his views, he always uses the pain example as a kind of one's own sensation. That is to say, in the case of speaking about a definite sensation, for example about pain, is the meaning of this sensation private? He argued that meaning of a word depends on its use within the context in which an argument is coming to existence. However, in this case, meaning of a sensation, for instance, that of pain, would not depend on an agreement or a consensus, but on one's conception of its own sensation. Having paid attention to this point, Wittgenstein suggested that meaning of a sensation, e.g. of pain, is not, in fact, subject to privacy but to the recognition of others.

The second argument of Wittgenstein aims to direct us to a possible fictitious example about some private signs which are created by a person, and this person writes some of his feelings and sensations into a diary. By

this example, he aims to show the difference between such an occupation and the language as taken for granted.

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but only in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. –It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call "measuring" is partly determined by certain constancy in results of measurements (Wittgenstein, 1953: prop242).

According to Wittgenstein, any kind of word that is to be viewed as meaningless does not exist, since the meaning of a word refers to the word itself. He stated that "every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands (Wittgenstein, 1953:1). Hence, he rejects the view that no difference between kinds of word exists. The meaning of a word exists on the basis of the difference between kinds of words and language games in the context in which they are used.

The point mentioned above is very much related to the problem of private language and that of language-games. Wittgenstein constructs the relation between language and the world on the concept of 'language-game'.

In this sense, language games cannot be private though rules and ostentions can be. In the case of aiming to understand a word, understanding is not realized by comprehending the rules or the ostentions in which it is used. We have to apply, according to Wittgenstein, to its logical home, that is to say its language-game in which it is used. In this sense, language-games come to picture as prior to their rules or their ostentions. This seems to be a necessary connection because if this is not the case, then the possibility of a specific rule orientation could be actualized.

One can successfully construct a private language by inventing private rules. Accordingly, it is argued by Wittgenstein that rules come to exist after the existence of languages in general. This is what makes languages public, and what brings about the occurrences of language-games. As previously stated, the private language problem is about the meaning of words, that is to say, how words come to mean anything. It is very much related to the structures of the rules of language.

It seems that what supply us with convention are the rules of language so that I can tell you something and you can teach me something. Such a convention creates common reactions which are prior to language though they can not constitute any sort of language. What I mean is that the agreement on reactions appears simultaneously with the appearance of language itself. The consensus in using language opens the way to understand the other. This is also the way of learning language and expressing our opinions. I argue that the meaning of words appears through a consensus, which can be embodied into more than one category.

The first category is common reactions. However, I think, this is an incomplete process into which the conception of a word could be realized. For example, it is possible to teach animals to display common reactions when they are stimulated. A group of bulls may have been trained to respond with common behaviors while they are stimulated by a red flag. However, such an experiment does not indicate that bulls have gained the concept of red or the concept of color in general. Accordingly, we need a more category to explain how we do have a concept or how we do understand the meaning and connotation of a word and communicate it with others.

This second category is referential point explaining that we understand the meaning of words by applying to their actual references. The relation can be connected by using the master example, namely, pain. In case of regarding the existence of the meaning of the word 'pain,' when we ask what the meaning of the word 'pain' is if someone says he has a pain, then the answer should be the word 'pain' itself. Accordingly, the meaning is to be private, that is, it is not subject to public control. For example, when I say 'I have five apples', the meaning of the word 'apple' can be controlled by public consensus through looking at the things named as apples and testing whether they are really apples or not. However, in the case of pain, when I say 'I have pain', the meaning of the word 'pain' does not emanate as it was in the case of the meaning of the word 'apple'. For, the meaning of the word 'pain' is not in the realm of the empirical check of other observers. The correct meaning of the word 'pain', thus, seems to be private, and it remains as a personal issue. I think, that although the meaning of the word 'pain' is not susceptible to public observation, there is another aspect that leads to a communal agreement in case of sensations. When I say 'I have pain', another person can understand me with reference to his or her own experience of pain so that this referential point brings about a consensus among individuals. However, there is another difficulty which may cause my theory to collapse. We can imagine a person who has never had a pain. Let us suppose this person has never become ill; he has never had a toothache or a headache or any other pain experience. In this example, we can raise the question of how this person can understand the meaning of the word 'pain'. It can rightly be argued that he cannot understand the meaning of pain due to his inexperience of such a sensation, nor he can display a reaction similar to others, who have had that experience.

In order to overcome this difficulty, we need a third category that supplies us with the meaning of words whose correspondence does not exist within the actual world but they still exist in our minds and in some of our experiences.

My third category would be the use of words in particular and the use of language in general. In this sense, it can be thought, as Wittgenstein did, that the meaning of the word 'pain' can even be realized by the one who

has never experienced pain through looking at its actual use, and through applying the word itself. But, this is not to say that it is possible to feel the same sensation as one's own. It may be impossible to determine one's own pain as that of mine. Here what we can possibly determine is to communicate our sensations as they are embodied in common use of language. However in the act of communication, as the human experiences are unique, a universal pain experience does not lead to a common understanding.

A common ground on which a reasonable meaning would come into the picture is the resemblance of sensations. This is what Wittgenstein calls "family resemblance".

III

In the *Investigation,* Wittgenstein is concerned with the social dimension of meaning. Although he does not deny the relation between words and world as an independent reality, he tries to cast light over other vital components that have been introduced into the concept of "language games." Wittgenstein starts with rejecting the Augustinian view of language focusing abstractly on the correlation of words and things, according to which the meaning of a symbol belongs to the thing that it represents. In this sense, language is restricted with some psychological assumptions, intentions, gestures and expressions of agents. This is a narrow conception of language due to regarding limited examples such as "stone", "snow" or people's names.

However, to grasp a true understanding of language we need to broaden our view and give attention to a wider range of examples. Wittgenstein criticizes Augustine that he presented a model of language that connects words to independent objects. He wanted to enrich this model by adding connections between words. By doing so, he goes to eliminate the 'word-world' connection to reach the concept of 'language games'. To explain that move, he uses a simple example of language game; a verbal exchange takes place between a master and his assistant. When the master calls 'block' or 'slab', or a name of a tool, then the assistant goes after and brings what is needed. In this example, the relation between words and the objects that they refer is taken for granted in a shared enterprise.

Complexities have been introduced into the mentioned example that opens new dimensions. In case of some other words such as 'this' or numbers which are problematic objects, or sensations like pain or pleasure, we have to move a new stage. The words that do not refer directly to concrete and independent objects would not make sense within the unproductive 'word-object' model that Augustine used to understand language.

This is the point that Wittgenstein reconsiders and argues against and it is the starting point that he wanted to construct his theory of meaning. By doing so, he goes on to say that the meaning of a word lies in its use, that is, how we use it. Accordingly, an examination of language in its social use is the basis of our understanding of the meaning of a word in the context of language game. Clearly, only through linguistic practice the correspondence between word and world exists and we encounter this fact in ordinary use of language (Wittgenstein, 1953: 6, 30, 51).

Wittgenstein asked:

Why can't my right hand give my left hand money? -My right hand can put it into my left hand. My right hand can write a deed of gift and my left hand a receipt.-But the further practical consequences would not be those of a gift. When the left hand has taken the money from the right, etc., we shall ask: "Well, and what of it?" and the same could be asked if a person had given himself a private definition of a word, I mean, if he has said the word to himself and at the same time has directed his attention to a sensation (Wittgenstein, 1953: 268).

For an object to be called a gift does not stem from its passing from hand to hand, nor does its shape, color or density. Rather, an object as gift to be uttered as gift should be given as a gift. Otherwise it is not more than a simple object. No object can be a gift without the giver and receiver having the concept of gift in the course of a social encounter. Wittgenstein uses such examples to illustrate the connection and interaction between words and things.

Wittgenstein was constructing example after example designed to show the connection between words and things is mediated by patterns of interaction. He called into play a whole variety of analogies to convey his point: styles of painting, economic relations, the institution of the gift; even his famous suggestion "think of the tools in a tool-box" (Wittgenstein 1953: 11) can be read in this way (Bloor, 2006: 367).

Here it is what makes an object a gift or money, and a behavior moral lies in their use in language as gift, money or moral. So to speak, we get an understanding that all linguistic practices have "idealist" and "performative" components. However, while regarding, for instance, an objects' having a red color which is an ordinary empirical knowledge, can we assert that being red for an object is self-referential or performative component in our utterances? In our use of language we make contribution to the use of empirical terms. So how do we get such concepts belonging to empirical objects stand out of us? Wittgenstein argues that just by seeing a red object, it is not possible to have the concept of red in particular and that of color in general. "Do not believe that you have the concept of color within you because you look at a colored object-however you look… It is a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made"

(Wittgenstein, 1953: 50). Concept possession has a complex procedure and it involves coordinating our use of words, which Wittgenstein calls "paradigms". This sample is an instrument of the language used in ascriptions of color. In this language-game it is not something that is represented, but is a means of representation.

This is what he calls ostensive learning in which, for instance, we have a color attribution by referring to the color itself, not to the color sample. However, samples are our instruments of learning that we convey information about. Ostensive learning is actualized through enculturation or socialization by the use of samples or paradigms.

Wittgenstein was indicating something fundamental to all talk about natural kinds. From the simplest to the most sophisticated, from our everyday talk to scientific theorizing, all such talk needs "paradigms." Of course, paradigms themselves vary in complexity… An object's having the role of "paradigm," however-and this is the vital point-does not reduce to its possessing this or that intrinsic nature. It has and requires such a nature, but it also has something else: a role that is accorded to it by virtue of how people regard it and treat it. This is a moral or social status, rather than something inherent in it. Nothing can be a paradigm "in itself," but only because a group uses it in that way. Its paradigmatic status derives from its being used as a paradigm, for example, in teaching and transmitting part of the local culture or in guiding routine usage. It facilitates interaction because it is available, and known to be available, as a reference point for coordinating our talking and doing (Bloor, 2006: 369).

In the sense mentioned above, a paradigm as a sample or an instrument of language is something like a cultural product. For instance, a commodity, or money or a saying is a paradigm. In this sense a paradigm, which is produced in our own shared practices, is what we produce intellectually and/or concretely as a good. Obviously, rather than being an ascribed property, a paradigm is what 'coordinating' and 'defining' our use of things and their external characters. Indeed, a paradigm becomes routine in our uses of language and linguistic practices in which we establish and sustain order into life and imagination.

Wittgenstein asserts that the routine use of language or a word has been performed under 'normal' cases. In case of breaking down routines, some collective decisions and choices come to being so as to reshape new ones. In this process authority is needed for maintaining the unity of usage and to prevent divergent tendencies which may be emerged as a result of anomalies and some divergent interests. As a result of consultation, when oppositions come to exist, we could reach a consensus by which we reestablish a new paradigm. Here, we do not appeal to an abstract higher court which is outside. Rather, it is the community itself that makes decisions to reach consultation into its tradition and some other internal

procedures. This is what Wittgenstein calls "forms of life". He puts as: "What has to be accepted, then given, is-so one could say-forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1953: 226).

Pure scientific concepts, such as gravity or oxygen, are not created as the outcome of our psychological responses. Having consideration on a short history of science, we observe that scientific terms like oxygen differ as their theoretical analysis alters. Scientific concepts and classifications have been changed and accordingly differently labeled. However, while we consider other concepts like 'red', could we say that its perception varies historically and culturally? How do we label an attribute like 'red' in our use of language? It psychologically and anthropologically seems that everybody and every culture has a concept of 'redness' even though it is labeled with different words. Redness can be explained in terms of having its "wavelengths of the spectrum" scientifically. It is not this scientific definition that uses red as universally but there is universality in our cultural use of it by the universal feature of our psychology.

Here we reach a psychological model of universal explanation of 'red'. Although this model can be employed as a means of overcoming "linguistic idealism", this is not the whole story of truth. The truth of our concept of 'red' could not be regarded just as a sociological or psychological phenomenon. The conventional use of it shows how we create norms in our social interaction, which guides all other scientific doings. This argument implies that norms, conventions and standards create our use of concepts including scientific ones in the language game as an act of play.

The difficulty lies here. How do the players of the language game sustain the game while facing such unique problems? And that can genuine knowledge be comprehended which is implicit in the game in the mentioned sense?

Wittgenstein's sense employs the concepts such as ostensive definitions, rules, the idea of language games, forms of life and family resemblance to construe the sense of a science that not transcendently but socially constructed in convention and in the use of language. In the course of this discussion, the truths and realities are socially created in linguistic practices. Hence he is concerned with conventions, customs and norms and institutions that sustain the social interactions. He maintains in the *Investigation* that the words that we use in our language have meaning in convention, that is, in their publicly correct use. That is why there cannot be a private language that can be used to express only one person's feelings or experiences. Indeed, to him, we can explain our inner experiences and feelings only by external and publicly available criteria. No matter if there exist inner states. As in the example of pain, the way to understand if one has a pain is to observe the existence of natural and verbal expression of pain.

Wittgenstein's argument intends to show that it is impossible to introduce into ordinary or public language a word that states a private mental state or a private object (Wittgenstein, 1953: sec.293). Private language argument offers a solution to the problem of Descartes' demon that may possibly deceive us. In the examination of our beliefs, it is wrong to look for foundations. Instead, to avoid doubts and uncertainties, we should be aware that there is at least one thing true which is the language that we speak. This basis brings about the idea that it is possible for others to learn and understand the language that I speak. Then, we grasp that we exist in a public realm which is not a fiction of the demon but the fundamental reality.

CONCLUSION

The question of privacy has many respects and implications in philosophy. A problem that inherited from Descartes' Cogito argument has widely been refused by many philosophers including Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein. Here I have tried to reexamine the mentioned problem by appealing to Wittgenstein's private language argument which asserts that there cannot be a private sense, object or language in the sense that is accessible and knowable to only one person.

By arguing that a language, as a private object, is not possible, Wittgenstein constructed a phenomenal world upon which the self, science and knowledge exist. This is what just Kant has done in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* where he argues that we are living in a world of phenomena where observable things exist. Accordingly we can derive knowledge from experience in the world of phenomena. However, for Kant, there might be a world beyond our experience as the 'thing in itself' which he calls '*noumenon'* something that given in thought. This parallels the private language argument contending, like Kant, that there is no a realm of pure subjectivity as Descartes designed.

We can draw a conclusion from Wittgenstein's private language argument that to be a self is simply to be a person who uses a language as the member of a community. In that community, there is no demon that deceives us but there are interpersonal relations as norms. The self as a person has access to his mental states by means of the public language that he or she speaks. The intentions, thoughts and feelings that make self free are acquired through the practice of public criticism in the moral community. Indeed, it is necessary to mention that the rational self or a rational individual is formed through communities, not vice versa. That is to say that the human world is socially constructed in many ways with its own grammar.

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