

Wittgenstein on Introspection and Introspectionism

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Abstract This paper reviews and defends Wittgenstein’s examination of the notion of introspecting psychological states and his critique of introspectionism, in the sense of using reflective awareness as a tool for philosophical or psychological investigation. Its focus is on inner psychological states, like pains or thoughts—it provisionally excludes perceptual states from this category. It approaches the philosopher’s concept of introspection through an analysis of concepts of awareness and self-awareness. It identifies at least two different forms of self-awareness, just one of which is attention to conscious processes. It sides with those who deny that any self-awareness is perception. It outlines and evaluates the primary objections Wittgenstein made to the notion that we can find out about the nature of our mental states through introspection. These objections involve, *inter alia*, the privacy of psychological states and the inherent fallibility of judgments based on introspective awareness. The critique motivates more cautious and effective psychological investigation of mental states, including proper use of subjects’ introspective reports, and a conceptual approach to the philosophy of mind. Wittgenstein’s reflections prefigure much later views about the problematic nature of introspective knowledge; yet, Wittgenstein receives virtually no mention or credit for this work from contemporary writers.

Keywords Philosophy · Philosophy of mind · Introspection · Self-awareness · Wittgenstein

My aim is to re-examine Wittgenstein’s views on introspection and introspectionism. Part of the object is just to understand him, in particular his critique of views of the tradition to which he was heir. I will then make an effort to evaluate his critique and sketch its relevance for contemporary uses of introspective methods.

I spoke of introspection and introspectionism and I do mean to use the terms in distinct ways. ‘Introspection’ is a name philosophers frequently use for attending to

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internal or psychological states. First person utterances that report such states are called ‘introspective’. Sometimes, simple consciousness of something is treated as introspection. These seem to be the dominant senses in which the term is still used in the literature.¹ I will call the latter, simple awareness of one’s states, introspection (1) and conscious exploration of or attention to one’s states introspection (2) for convenience. By ‘introspectionism’ I mean a tool some philosophers and psychologists advocate for coming to know about our conscious mental states. This is a matter of attending to them in such a way as to come to know their character. Here, we are speaking mostly of an older method employed in the philosophy of mind and in psychology, with roots in the eighteenth century empiricists, but introspectionism does still rear its head from time to time.

Insofar as Wittgenstein is concerned, I will focus mostly on the *Philosophical Investigations (PI)* but I will take a look at some supporting texts from other works, principally what in the latest edition of *PI* is called *The Philosophy of Psychology—A Fragment (PPF)*, the two volumes of notebooks published as *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology (RPP I and II)* and the volumes called *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology (LW)*.

What Is It to Be Introspective?

What should we understand by the term ‘introspection’? Wittgenstein rather notoriously said his aim was to bring concepts home from distorted philosophical—he says ‘metaphysical’—uses to their ordinary ones.² This is indeed his approach in many of his conceptual investigations and we can discern such a motif in his treatment of ‘introspection’. Nevertheless, there are indications that he recognized specialized senses of ‘introspection’, as defined above, and used the expression in one or both of these senses occasionally.³

Let us start with the ordinary expressions, ‘introspection’ and ‘being introspective’. What sorts of uses do these expressions have? Most commonly, when we say we examined something introspectively, we mean we have engaged in self-examination. We have been reflective about ourselves. We have considered or reconsidered what we think or feel, often with a view to figuring it out, and sometimes with a view to revising opinions or reorienting attitudes. Wittgenstein draws this ordinary concept to our attention at *PI* §587.

Does it make sense to ask ‘How do you know that you believe that?’—and is the answer: ‘I find it out by introspection’?

In some cases it will be possible to say some such thing, in most not.

It makes sense to ask, ‘Do I really love her, or am I only fooling myself?’, and the process of introspection is the calling up of memories, of imagined possible situations, and of the feelings that one would have if...⁴

¹ See Rosenthal (2000), p. 201. He objects to the use of ‘introspection’ in the sense (1) and reserves it for sense (2). However, he allows (1) is used by some philosophers (p. 207).

² *PI*, §116

³ Usually ironically, as at *RPP I*, §792, but sometimes straightforwardly, as perhaps at *RPS II*, §250.

⁴ See also §677 for a legitimate ordinary use of ‘introspection’.

Sometimes we use ‘introspective’ in a more general sense about someone’s character. We call a person ‘introspective’ when she is of an inward-looking temperament. She engages in self-examination or in questioning her motives or beliefs frequently, compared with the rest of us.

Why does Wittgenstein say in the passage cited that in most cases we do not find out about our internal states through introspection? A full answer to this will come later but, if we stay with the ordinary sense for now, introspection is a rare exercise directed at issues of personal importance, whereas ‘introspection’ (1) is not. Calling such ordinary awareness by this term debases its currency. One does not find out by self-examination that one is in pain or that one thinks it is raining outside. However, there is no reason why one should not use ‘introspection’ in sense (1) as long as we understand that these are not its ordinary senses. Introspection (2) is less common than introspection (1), since we are aware of our mental states more often than we consciously attend to them. Still, introspection (2) is not our ordinary concept. Self-examination is not merely a matter of attending consciously to a mental state.

‘Introspection’ in senses (1) and (2) are specialized replacements not for the ordinary concept of introspection but for the ordinary concepts of awareness and self-awareness. Let us turn to these.

Introspection as Awareness or Self-Awareness

I want to achieve two things in this section that will not be easy to combine. I want to explore the uses of ‘awareness’⁵ and ‘self-awareness’ and consider the possibility of an innocent philosophical use of ‘introspection’ as shorthand for them, but at the same time I want to carry out an exegesis of Wittgenstein’s written views on the matter. I will proceed by making the investigation primary and noting Wittgenstein’s views, as I understand them, along the way.

I⁶ feel pain in my shoulder. Is it also the case that I am aware of pain in my shoulder? I believe it is going to rain. Am I aware that I believe it is going to rain? I want very much to see *Measure for Measure* at Stratford this summer. Am I aware of my desire? The questions seem downright silly. One wants to paraphrase Wittgenstein by answering: ‘Nonsense! But of course!’ These questions seem silly partly because they do not have an obvious use, and partly because awareness in these cases seems to follow as a matter of course. What normal use could they have? The primary way to explain the meaning of such a predicate is to look at the behaviour the psychological state manifests, but what would this be like? One might, in part, show one’s awareness of a pain just by standard pain behaviour and by being awake. One might show awareness of one’s belief by stating it, but saying one is aware of it is just the sort of utterance that seems strange or silly. Consider: ‘X is in pain and is aware he is in pain’; ‘X believes it will rain and shows every sign of being aware of his belief’; ‘X wants to go to Stratford and is, to my surprise, aware he wants to go’. Notice that we cannot readily put the

⁵ A distinction I ignore in what follows is Shoemaker’s between ‘awareness of’ and ‘awareness that’. I ignore it because I cannot make out a consistent way of mapping it onto our standard uses of these terms. His view appears in ‘Self-Knowledge and Inner Sense’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*: 54, 1994, pp. 259ff.

⁶ Nothing hangs on using the first person here. These could as easily be in the second or third person.

second halves of these conjunctions into the negative. ‘X is in pain but not aware of it’; ‘X believes it is going to rain but is not aware of it’; etc. These have roughly the ring of Moore’s paradox. What could it mean to be in pain and not be aware of it? Being in pain is not something we do not notice. If we noticed no pain, could we be in pain? What about beliefs and desires?⁷ Here, we will have different answers depending on circumstances, but for a large class of ordinary cases, as in my examples above, it would be bizarre to say we want or believe something without being aware of it. ‘X looks at the clouds and puts his palm out. He checks to see if his umbrella is handy. He thinks it will rain...but is not aware of it.’ (?) ‘X studied the playbill and saw *Measure for Measure* is playing at Stratford this summer. He adores the play and went on line to purchase tickets. But he has no idea he wants to go to see it.’ (?) There is such a thing as being unconscious of one’s belief or being in a state of denial about what one believes but what role could they have in these cases?

Being aware of sensations, beliefs and wants seems just to come with having the sensations, beliefs and wants. In what sense ‘come with’? It is not in the sense that the states and the awareness of them are different mental states that are always or almost always conjoined, one stacked on top of the other, to paraphrase some philosophers of mind. Could we test whether someone’s belief that it is going to rain is a state he is aware of? Do we need to? We might say that, in some broad sense of ‘awareness’, these states, belief, sensation and the like, just are states of awareness or states of which we are aware. ‘Aware’ used in this way is an odd concept, a concept like ‘physical object’⁸ used primarily at a rather abstract level to establish category distinctions among our concepts. Feeling a pain in one’s knee is a state of awareness; bruising one’s knee after bumping into a railing is not (indeed, one might not notice a bruise). It is not surprising that there is so little use for saying one is aware of a mental state. It would be used mostly in explaining the meanings of psychological concepts. This is not to deny that there are very ordinary uses of ‘aware’. ‘He heard what sounded like breathing in the alleyway and was suddenly aware of his surroundings.’ This means something like becoming alert. ‘Are you aware [i.e., do you know] that dumping oil down the sink causes pollution?’ ‘Were you aware of the defensive end running toward you to tackle you?’ I.e. did you see him?

We could, with certain provisos, substitute ‘conscious’ for ‘aware’ in its more abstract sense. That is, as long as we do not limit the use of ‘conscious’ to a process going on in our minds (pain is conscious in this sense but belief, emotion and, normally, desire are not), we could say sensations, beliefs, emotions and desires are conscious states, meaning just that they are psychological states, states of the mind, experiences, states of awareness. Wittgenstein does not usually use ‘aware’ or ‘awareness’ except in colloquial contexts but he does have a discussion of consciousness in *PI*. What he has to say about attributing consciousness to someone is that it often serves as a classificatory or categorical term that subsumes various expressions for psychological states.⁹ This brings one use of introspection as awareness, sense (1), back to earth. Saying, ‘If someone is in pain (or believes that

⁷ Kenny (see ‘Cartesian Privacy’ in Canfield, p. 136) distinguishes between states that are modes of consciousness (sensation), rather as I am proposing, and states that are accompanied by consciousness (willing). I would rather say, even in the case of willing, that there is a use of ‘willing’ in which consciousness of one’s will is separate from willing but this need not always be the case.

⁸ See *OC*, §36

⁹ *PI*, §416. See also § 281

p), she is aware of her pain (or belief that *p*)' is fair enough but it does not amount to a grand principle of the reflexivity of 'thought' (or 'self-reflexivity', as some writers redundantly say). The inference holds just because it classifies a psychological state as one falling under the concept or category of awareness or consciousness. This, I suggest, is what philosophers call 'introspection' in sense (1).

But there is another use of 'awareness' for ordinary mental states that does imply two experiences going on at the same time or in close temporal proximity. It is this that corresponds with 'introspection' (2). It involves taking 'aware' or 'conscious' to mean attentive. Suppose a doctor asks us to say what a pain we are having feels like. We might then consciously attend to it. We might say, I am consciously attending to my pain now but I can't tell you anything out of the ordinary about it. There might be behavioural signs other than speech, like tightening one's brow or having that glazed look as we do when our eyes are open but we aren't focusing on anything visually. In these circumstances, we might even say, 'I am perceiving my pain' or 'I am perceiving my conscious state'. These last sentences sound awkward but Wittgenstein allows that they might be used for saying one is focusing or attentively focused on a state.¹⁰ To the extent that we say such things, they seem to mean just that we are paying attention.

Note that we cannot use this sense of 'awareness' in all the sample contexts I have been considering. We encounter a disparity, for example, between cases of sensation and those of belief, emotion and desire. We can focus our attention to some extent on a sensation, like a feeling of pain or pleasure or a kinaesthetic sensation. For example, we might immerse ourselves in a feeling of pleasure or contentment or be quite absorbed by an intense pain. But what would it mean to say we are focusing our attention on a belief or a desire? There are differences among these psychological concepts; some are not fit objects of conscious attention. We may say that a belief is a conscious state in the sense that it is a psychological state (the state of a conscious being) but it is not a conscious state in the way that a sensation is or, for that matter, the way a thought process running through our minds is. We can try to attend to the feeling of spatial movement in our bodies when we sway or turn or lift an arm but not in the same way to a belief. One can be in the course of being in pain, but not in the course of believing something. We can say, 'I was in pain just as the phone rang,' but not 'I believed the weather would get worse just as the phone rang'. Even if we say to ourselves, 'I believe that *p*', our inner speech is not our belief, for one might well say this to oneself when one does not believe *p*. Even if one does believe what one says to oneself, such inner speech is a thought of one's belief, not the belief itself. One may want to go to see a play but one's want is not to be identified with sensations going on in us over a period of time. In wanting an apple, one may (or then again may not) experience a salivating longing for the apple. There appears to be a use of 'desire' for such conscious feelings but it is only one of its uses. One can desire something without accompanying internal pyrotechnics. In the case of the ordinary beliefs and desires I have been considering, one does not attribute them to oneself on the basis of what one experiences (and still less do others, who know nothing of another's experiences).¹¹ This observation goes for emotional states as well. Setting aside certain cases of subliminal grief ('Before today, I

¹⁰ §417

¹¹ This is without prejudice to there being cases in which the desire or belief is initially subliminal and one becomes aware of it through awareness of one's experiences or even one's behaviour.

had no idea that my erratic behaviour and bitter feelings were signs that my grief at the loss of X never ended'), awareness of ordinary states of grief is not a matter of observation nor of inference from or evaluation of or construction out of the sensations or feelings one has when grieving.¹²

I will look briefly at the concepts 'self-awareness' and 'self-consciousness'. These have ordinary, unproblematic uses. Both are usually used as attributes of character but they are not synonyms. A self-aware person might, in a positive sense, be someone aware of her place, confident, in control. Self-awareness might be manifested in bearing or in a capacity to notice facets of herself, her surroundings and the relationship she has to her surroundings. If we put the accent on 'self', 'self-aware', she may be egoistic, too self-oriented. The latter is admittedly a less common use; we would usually put the matter otherwise if we were calling her excessively egoistic ('high maintenance' comes to mind). 'Self-conscious' is a very common expression applied to people who are unsure of themselves, bashful, feeling out of place, trying rather too hard to behave in a way they think is expected of them, looking at themselves through others' eyes. There is also a more intellectual sense. Self-consciousness is an attribute of humans, their capacity to know things about themselves. In a recent public interview, the novelist John Banville suggested (in language far more elegant than I can reproduce) that self-consciousness is both a positive and a tragic feature of humanity. It is the basis of art but it is also what enables us, unlike other animals, to know about our own mortality.

There are more bizarre philosophical uses in which self-awareness is some sort of perception of an entity called 'the self', as though there were an inner perception of a non-physical entity that constitutes the referent of 'I'. I will take it for granted that such a concept of the self or of introspective access to it is of little philosophical interest or, if it is, it can be left to metaphysicians with a passionate interest in *outré* possibilities. The 'self' or '-self' in compounds normally just draws attention to some person.¹³

This discussion does not exhaust the meanings of 'aware' or 'conscious' but will suffice.

Introspection as Perception

My putative introspectionist takes attention to one's inner states as a source of knowledge of the mind. Traditionally, an assumption, usually a conscious one, that lent support to introspectionism was that 'introspection' in its rather ordinary sense of awareness of inner states names a sort of inner observation or perception. It is an apprehension of inner objects parallel to the apprehension of external objects. This issue is well travelled¹⁴ but I will review the older history of the assumption briefly and lay out some objections Wittgenstein makes or ones that can be developed from remarks of his. This section serves as a preliminary to the discussion of his general critique of introspectionism.

¹² *PPF* ix, §67. I do not deny that there is a use of 'grieve' that, like 'desire', does apply to conscious feelings that one can attend to. It is not my impression that Wittgenstein denies there are such uses in the paragraph cited.

¹³ In Wittgenstein studies, the definitive study of this sense of 'self-awareness' is Canfield's *The Looking Glass Self: An Examination of Self-awareness*, New York, etc.: Praeger, 1990.

¹⁴ An early mention of this, dating from 1965, is in John W. Cook, "Wittgenstein on Privacy" in Canfield 1986, p. 75.

The use of ‘perception’ for inner states goes back, at least, to David Hume.¹⁵ Having the impression of a coloured object in space is a perception but so is having a memory image of it and being aware of this memory. They just differ in their force and liveliness. The same applies to feeling pains or pleasures.¹⁶ This assumption was explicit in the work of some psychologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, although William James is relatively careful to use ‘perception’ in relation to physical objects, he calls introspection ‘observation’.¹⁷ So does Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein’s early mentor.¹⁸ The view was largely abandoned subsequently, at least in philosophy, but it is not dead.¹⁹ Among psychologists and philosophers of mind, we also see terms like ‘interoception’ and ‘proprioception’. If we take the suffix literally, it might suggest that inner awareness be treated as a kind of perception or, at any rate, a receiving of sensory information.²⁰ The root ‘-spec’ in ‘introspection’ more immediately suggests the same.

Inner observation has a certain character, according to these traditional views. First, it is assumed that, when we are in a certain psychological state, something is going on in our minds. All states are assimilated to mental processes. Hume and James call belief a ‘feeling’ or think it is identified by a feeling with which it is connected.²¹ Secondly, introspection of these states has the structure of a subject-object relation. Being in pain is, in a sense, the state of being conscious of one’s pain. A feeling breaks down into a perception or apprehension and what is perceived or apprehended. Wittgenstein’s approach to assessing these assumptions is to look at how we use ‘perceive’ and why it is usually an awkward expression to use for attention to one’s inner states.

Specialized talk about perceiving one’s sensations has an awkward feel. We rarely hear it from ordinary speakers. Admittedly, a patient might tell a doctor that she perceives a sharp stabbing pain in her arm when she moves it in a certain way but even these uses are relatively rare. Moreover, ‘perception’ is virtually never heard in relation to beliefs or wants. For that matter, it is not heard much from ordinary speakers even for sight, hearing, etc., though this is its primary field of use. Cases of ‘see’ are standard or paradigmatic for talk about sensory perception so I will focus on them, while granting that this paradigm should not be applied without circumspection to other senses. ‘I see *this*’ is the standard report of visual experience noted by Wittgenstein.²² One sees tables and chairs, sunsets, baseball games, a ball rolling down a road, the colours of clothing, the shapes of boxes, a landscape covered in snow, etc. (On the other hand, we taste, smell, hear or feel primarily properties of things.) What can we say in general terms about uses of ‘see’?

One point is that what we see has spatio-temporal parameters and location. We see three-dimensionally, even many pictures, at least those that represent scenes from life.²³

¹⁵ Hume, p. 10. I do not know if Hume used the term ‘introspection’ for such “internal perceptions” (I cannot find an instance in a brief scan).

¹⁶ p. 9

¹⁷ James, I, 1890, p. 185. His treatment of perception appears in vol. II, chapter 19.

¹⁸ Russell, p. 118

¹⁹ See Prinz and Peacocke in McLaughlin and Cohen. Peacocke denies that all psychological states are perceptual but, by implication, accepts that some are.

²⁰ Alan Fogel calls interoception a monitoring of the inner states of the body and proprioception the ‘felt sense of location’, pp. 11, 83.

²¹ Hume, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32; James, II, p. 283

²² PPF, §111

²³ §148

A second is that what we see would still be there if we were not viewing it. It exists independently of us.²⁴ What goes with this is that others can see such things too, when we are not looking at them. We and they may report what we see differently. An assertion about what one sees is subject to scrutiny. It can be wrong and it could be corrected by looking again or having others look or by taking into consideration special conditions applying to one's observation. A third rather general point is that reports of what we see are usually non-inferential. If I say, 'I see a chair over there', I do not infer this report of my experience from, say, propositions about 'sense-data' I am experiencing or facts about the circumstances in which I speak or physical conditions ('Light rays struck my retina and...').²⁵ The fourth aspect has to do with reference. I can point out anything in my list to someone else. 'What chair did you mean?' 'I meant that one over there.' Finally, at a more abstract level of analysis, we could say something about the kinds or categories of experience, the very general concepts what we experience falls under. My examples include physical objects (chairs), their properties (colours and shapes), events (sunsets) and states of affairs (a ball sitting still, a snow-covered landscape). We can also talk at a more abstract level about criteria of identity for some object, property, event or state of affairs we observe on different occasions. That is, we can talk about a chair which we see as the same chair which we saw before or a different one. In the case of objects, such criteria of identity are common, not necessarily abstruse or metaphysical (though they are the basis for what philosophers call criteria of individuation or identity). They could include differences in their properties ('My chair didn't have that streak of red paint on it'), temporal continuity ('I saw the workman take that chair out of the room and bring in another one'), and the like.²⁶ Criteria of identity for properties, events and states of affairs differ from those for objects and are often subjects of philosophical controversy, but identifying the same X is not usually a problem in ordinary practice. Think of differentiating one instance of a ball's rolling down a hill from another or our capacity to reidentify something as of the same colour as something else.

Compare with this our concepts of sensation or belief and the utterances which we make about them. 'I feel a pain.' Is my pain a public object or property that others could observe or that could pertain if I were not experiencing it? It is not; sensations are private.²⁷ A pain does have spatio-temporal location in a way and it could be called a property of a person or subject,²⁸ but does it have spatial dimensions? Would it make any sense to say, 'My pain is 3 cm long'? If my utterance is a report rather than an expression of pain, it can be true or false and is subject to correction, but not by submitting it to the inspection of a second party. A second party is limited to observing my pain behaviour. Are there criteria of identity for my pain? There are in a way but they do not work like those that we routinely apply to what we see. If I say I am having the same pain in my elbow as I had yesterday, I seem to be talking generically. I am having the same type of pain I have had before. Someone else might also have the same

²⁴ *PPF*, §67; *RPS I*, §1085

²⁵ *PI*, §486

²⁶ §253

²⁷ §248

²⁸ This seems implied at *PI*, §281, *inter alia*. A human being is the subject of sensations, so they are properties of her. However, Wittgenstein, as far as I know, does not say explicitly psychological states are properties of persons.

type of pain I have. But the pain in my elbow is not a quasi-object that retreated into a storage room for a while and then reappeared or that I could transmit to another person with a bill of sale.²⁹ Speaking generically of pains is like speaking generically of colours, but I do not attribute the same pain I have had to another by observation, as I do when I identify the colour of a canary and the colour of a painted wall. I can refer to my or another's pain but I cannot point to it. More particularly, I cannot point it out to someone else. Wittgenstein, says,

When speaking, one can refer to an object by pointing at it. Here pointing is a part of the language-game. And now it seems to us as if one spoke *of* a sensation by directing one's attention to it. But where is the analogy? It evidently lies in the fact that one can point at a thing by *looking* or *listening*.³⁰

If a pain characterizes me, it is not a property like the colour of a ball I could point out to someone. I can attend to it but not by orienting my eyes or ears in some direction. I might draw someone else's attention to it by nodding toward its location or showing the location. In *LW I*, he says about visual impressions (putatively private sensory experiences) that we do not look at them; rather, we look at objects, etc.³¹ About a feeling of grief he says,

So if I somehow look at my grief then I am not observing the impression that I thereby receive.³²

In sum, inner awareness is non-perceptual for Wittgenstein.

Introspectionism

I defined introspectionism as an instrument of research of a now largely passé school of psychology and philosophy whose aim was to obtain knowledge of the nature of our psychological states through an internal 'inspection' of them. The principal nineteenth century representatives of this school in psychology were Wundt and Titchener.³³ James viewed introspection to be a principal tool of empirical psychology, but he recognized deficiencies in it and recommended that they be remedied by comparing and generalizing from many cases.³⁴ This may be a useful corrective; I will consider it further in due course. In any case, Wittgenstein's rejection of introspectionism is radical. He persistently advises us against trying to find out about the nature of an inner experience by attending to the experience. About the meaning of 'pain', for example, he says,

²⁹ The same reference as the penultimate. This is what we usually mean but it does not rule out talking about a pain as the same one if it has persisted continuously or talking about a pain non-generically, *this* or *that* pain being the one that NN has.

³⁰ §669

³¹ §619

³² §620

³³ A useful summary of the history of introspectionism in psychology appears in Schwitzgebel 2004.

³⁴ James 1890, I, pp. 189–90

It indicates a fundamental misunderstanding, if I'm inclined to study my current headache in order to get clear about the philosophical problem of sensation.³⁵

On aspect perception, he says,

If someone says that he knows by introspection that it is a case of 'seeing', the answer is: 'And how do I know what you are calling introspection? You explain one mystery to me by another.'³⁶

Why should introspection not be a source of knowledge about our inner states? We can answer this by noting another of his remarks.

In order to get clear about the meaning of the word 'think', we watch ourselves thinking; what we observe will be what the word means!—But that's just *not* how this concept is used. (It would be as if without knowing how to play chess, I were to try and make out what the word 'checkmate' means by close observation of the last move of a game of chess.)³⁷

We no more understand what thinking is through awareness of a thought than we understand what checkmate is by observing the move. 'What?' questions are conceptual questions. Rather, we should direct, our attention away from inward gazing and onto our concepts, since it is these that have meaning available to all speakers of a language. Similarly, one does not find out about the nature of pain by studying one's headache. We find out about the nature of pain by looking at the use or uses of 'pain'. This is roughly what Wittgenstein attempts in the section on pain in *PI*.³⁸ This sort of 'philosophical investigation' has an importance for empirical psychology because research can proceed only by having concepts already in place. These need not be ordinary concepts; they may have been rendered clearer or redefined or posited anew. Conceptual clarity helps avoid errors, such as failing to appreciate that there is a great variety of psychological concepts, many of which do not apply to mental processes.

Wittgenstein takes up the introspectionist project all the same and gives it a run to see if it is capable of succeeding in its claims. In a passage that is hardly a neutral description, he portrays an act of deliberate introspection as follows:

...What can it mean to speak of 'turning my attention on to my own consciousness'? There is surely nothing more extraordinary than that there should be any such thing! What I described with these words (which are not used in this way in ordinary life) was an act of gazing. I gazed fixedly in front of me—but *not* at any particular point or object. My eyes were wide open, brows not contracted (as they mostly are when I am interested in a particular object). No such interest preceded this gazing. My glance was vacant; or again, *like* that of someone admiring the illumination of the sky and drinking in the light.³⁹

³⁵ *PI*, §314

³⁶ *RPP I*, §8

³⁷ *PI*, §316

³⁸ Roughly §271 ff., but it overlaps extensively with the section on private language that precedes it.

³⁹ *PI*, §412

This is ridicule and ridicule is not argument. What case can be made against introspectionism? Wittgenstein's case is multiform and scattered through his writings. It can be called, for the most part, a conceptual critique. To see its scope, we need to pull some of its strands together.

Psychological States Present a Particular Challenge to Empirical Study Because of Their Privacy

Evidence and, in general, material for scientific analysis must be open to anyone to inspect. But whatever anyone 'knows' from introspection fails this test. This is the case both for the introspecting subject, since she cannot point out her inner experiences to anyone else, and for a scientific observer, since she has no direct access to others' experiences, no way to observe them. Wittgenstein's point appears in the section devoted to the private language arguments, one of the most famous parts of the *PI*.⁴⁰ One's private experience cannot serve as evidence for any proposition, even for oneself, just because it is private. We may be tempted to think that the pain we feel is evidence on which we base our assertion. Notice, first, the strangeness of this idea. We do not first gaze internally at our pains and then offer a judgment of our condition. We just *express* our condition.⁴¹ We think over our state only in rather special circumstances, in response to unfamiliar questions or less obvious feelings. But the main point is just that evidence must be public, accessible to and verifiable by anyone; it must be subject to correction on the basis of public scrutiny.⁴² In consequence, no induction can be based on these private experiences. One cannot even formulate generalizations *about oneself* on the basis of introspection. This would require generalizing from a series of similar experiences to general truths about oneself, which in turn would require reidentifying states as of the same type. Although we may be confident that we can do this, we do it on the basis of our own memories and beliefs, not on the basis of evidence. This is tantamount to basing a judgment on the subjective factor of what one thinks to be the case. What one thinks may well be the case but thinking something to be so does not make it so.⁴³

Even if awareness of one's psychological states were evidence, we could not make valid inductive inferences from it. One cannot infer general truths from one's experience, because it would then be based on one case only. This fails to meet even the

⁴⁰ §240 ff. The literature on the so-called private language argument is vast. Many older pieces are collected in Canfield and a classic statement of an influential view appears in Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Mind*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990 (vol. 3 of *Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*) pp. 15–113. More recent contributions include Baker, "The Private Language Argument", *Language and Communication*, 18 1998, pp. 225–56 (a departure from the view in *Meaning and Mind*), Canfield, "Private Language: the Diary Case", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 79, 2001, pp. 377–94 (which challenges the thesis that there is "an argument" and views the material as offering reasons for aspects of the private linguist's view) and Schulte's comment on Baker in the *Oxford Handbook*, electronic source, pp. 429–50.

⁴¹ See Moyal-Sharrock, "Words as Deeds: Wittgenstein's 'Spontaneous Utterances and the Dissolution of the Explanatory Gap'", *Philosophical Psychology*, 13, issue 3, 2000, pp. 355–72.

⁴² Wittgenstein does not, as far as I can see, discuss the nature of evidence but a requirement that evidence be public seems implied in the treatment of private language. Moreover, although the fit is not exact, one can draw a parallel in this respect between evidence and criteria (discussed in the case of pain at §288–290). The fit is not exact because criteria are standards for meaningful utterance, not for truth (at least, in my view).

⁴³ §258, 293

loosest standards for verification. Always ask: ‘What is your sample?’ There are no reasons to believe in the truth of a hypothesis with so limited an evidentiary basis.⁴⁴

Claims Based on Introspection Are Fallible Because of the Often Fleeting, Vague Nature of Experience

The extent to which we have a clear awareness of inner states varies. This depends partly on whether awareness or attention comes with the inner process or is separate and usually subsequent. We may feel pain and be aware of it at the same time but in other cases, such as a process of thinking, this is not so straightforward. Wittgenstein’s observation appears to be that, when we think, we attend to something we are thinking about but we are usually inattentive to the thinking itself. In fact, one may interfere with the other.⁴⁵ To do both simultaneously would be rather like taking batting practice and at the same time noting problems with one’s stance or stroke. It is much easier for someone else to diagnose these problems or, if we do it ourselves, to do it later by watching a tape of oneself. When we actually think about something, it is extraordinarily difficult to focus on what we are thinking, and still less the nature of thinking, at the same time.⁴⁶ When we are reflective about the nature of our thought, we usually do it when we are not engaged in thinking, when ‘the motor is idling’. Such ‘introspection’ is undertaken through the good offices of one’s memory of what earlier went on in one’s mind. This mental act is what now tends to be called retrospection rather than introspection. Retrieving memories can be difficult, especially of inner states. Even when we do remember well, our judgment based on memory is subjective in the sense discussed. One is alone the authority for it, which is to say there is no authoritative standard for the judgments one makes about its nature. Being dependent on memory, we tend to remember best what we thought of last or perhaps a memory’s most salient feature.

Even worse, it is suspicious that we seem to be aware of certain conscious states and of their general features only when we attend to them. We are unaware of them when we are engaged in an activity and aware of them when we focus. Does this mean they were there all along, like a distant person we only dimly saw or failed to notice at first? Or does it mean they are there only when we focus on them? The inapplicability of ‘perception’ talk to introspective awareness tends to rule this out. What is it for such sensations to ‘be there’? A physical state might well be there but a state of awareness of which we are unaware?⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *PI*, §293. Sharrock and Coulter make a similar point about ordinary physical activities like tying one’s shoelaces. Reflection on what one is doing would get in the way. ‘Revisiting “The Unconscious”’, *Perspicuous Presentations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 111–12. My manner of putting this point may be more general than Wittgenstein intended. See Canfield, *op. cit.*, 2001.

⁴⁵ At *PPF*, §296, he notes the difficulty of finding out by introspection what it is like to have a word you have been searching for occur to you. The original paragraph at *LW*, §850, makes explicit the idea of interference: ‘And how can I pay attention to it at all while I am philosophizing?’

⁴⁶ I am reminded of an undergraduate professor who, in talking about the Kantian approach to epistemology said knowledge is by a subject of an object ($S \rightarrow O$) but when one does philosophy S ’s attention is on the relation itself, as if an arrow circles up from S and down to the arrow conjoining S with O . I wondered why I could not perform such intellectual acrobatics that philosophers apparently performed with ease.

⁴⁷ That is, there could be evidence that one’s brain and neural system are at work in monitoring one’s physical state even though we have no conscious awareness of anything. Such states are sometimes called subconscious, but it seems to me we should call them non-conscious.

Let us look more closely at some texts. The contrast between the mental and things in the world is in part designed to draw attention to the insubstantiality of inner experience. At *PPF* §134, Wittgenstein calls an inner visual impression ‘a strangely vacillating entity’.⁴⁸ But it is in the paragraphs on reading that he drives the point home. They contain material about feelings of which one may be aware when confronted with familiar and with unfamiliar symbols.⁴⁹ In §169–70, a subject is enjoined to read a familiar sentence and to notice the feelings she has when she does so and then to attach words to a line of squiggles and notice the different feelings she has when she does this.

Can’t one feel that in the first case the utterance was *connected* with seeing the signs and in the second went on side by side with the seeing without any connection?...I’d like to say: when I read, I feel a certain *influence* on what I say from that series of arbitrary squiggles.⁵⁰

In *RPP* he takes up awareness of the kinaesthetic sensations one has in moving one’s limbs. Experiments to find out what people experience are inherently flawed.

...It sounds too much like an appeal to introspection, if I wanted to say ‘Test yourself, now—see whether you really determine the position of your limbs by feelings in them.’—And it would even be wrong, for then the question is: If someone did that, how would it come out that he did? For suppose after self-examination he were to assure me that it was so, or that it was not so,—how do I know whether I have the right to trust him; I mean, whether he has even understood me right? Or again: how do I test whether I understand him?⁵¹

The source of these doubts is rooted in more than one factor, for instance, (1) the unverifiable nature of such introspective reports (who knows what she is feeling or whether what she feels is like something one feels oneself?) and (2) the fact that when we normally move our limbs we do not notice these sensations.

In *PPF* viii, he compares their vagueness with, say, the sharpness of a pain in the same location.

A ‘feeling’ has for us a quite *particular* interest. And that involves, for instance, the ‘degree of intensity of the feeling’, its ‘location’, and the extent to which one feeling can be submerged by another.⁵²

He notes the difficulty of describing any feeling when asked to do so on the basis of carrying out some movement.⁵³ Much of this short section is devoted to the issue of whether we infer a movement from a kinaesthetic feeling.⁵⁴ He denies this. We say, ‘I

⁴⁸ I assume here that he is talking about impressions in general and not the vacillation between what one ‘sees’, e.g. duck and rabbit, in an aspect perception case.

⁴⁹ E.g. *PI*, §165–67

⁵⁰ §169

⁵¹ *RPP I*, §794

⁵² *PPF*, §66 in *PI*.

⁵³ §63

⁵⁴ §56–57, 66

moved my arm', without appeal to evidence and we ascribe the concept to ourselves without criteria. The case in which a kinaesthetic sensation is submerged by a more powerful feeling, such as a sharp pain, is the *coup de grâce*. We say we moved our arm but how could we do so on the 'evidence' of a sensation hidden by a more obvious one? He does not appear to doubt that we sometimes notice kinaesthetic sensations but we do so infrequently. None of what he says implies that we do not have a sense of 'where we are', which is shown in our behaviour. Such a sense is surely very important in our lives and we would be in deep trouble if we were not often right about it.

Our Introspective Judgments About States Whose Existence or Nature Is Uncertain to Us Are Often the Product of Bias

We are often suggestible when it comes to certain of our introspective reports. That is, we may be looking for something an experimenter or therapist has suggested to us or perhaps we come up with some description on our own as a result of peculiar perspectives on our experience and arbitrarily impose it. Wittgenstein's diagnosis is as follows, first from the case of reading:

We'd never have hit on the idea that we *felt the influence* of the letters on us when reading had we not compared the case of letters with that of arbitrary marks. And here we do indeed notice a *difference*. And we interpret it as the difference between influence and absence of influence. And we're especially inclined toward this interpretation when we make a point of reading slowly—perhaps in order to see what does happen when we read. When we, so to speak, more or less deliberately let ourselves be *guided* by the letters. But this 'letting myself be guided' in turn consists only in my looking carefully at the letters....⁵⁵

Are we aware of this feeling of being guided by the letters when we read and of the difference when we attach sounds to squiggles? Yes, we are in a way, when we deliberately focus on the experience while we read or it may be better to say we can think of our experience in this light. But this is not a reliable guide to what we experience when we do not deliberately focus on the mental accoutrements of reading. We are not likely to notice any attendant feelings then⁵⁶ and what we do not notice cannot be, i.e. tautologically is not, a conscious experience.

Wittgenstein continues at §175:

...*While* I let myself be guided, everything is quite simple, I notice nothing special; but afterwards, when I ask myself what it was that happened, it seems to have been something indescribable. *Afterwards* no description satisfies me. It's as if I couldn't believe that I merely looked, made such-and-such a face, and drew a line. But do I *remember* anything else? No: and yet I feel as if there must have been something else.... Only then does the idea of that ethereal, intangible influence arise.

⁵⁵ §170

⁵⁶ See also *RPP I*, §770–71 and *LW*, §614–15.

That is, whether from our guide's suggestions or our own inventiveness, we come up with an account of such an experience very much retrospectively. It is interpretative and, like any interpretation, open to question. How would we resolve such doubts? How could we test the claim? It would be easy for someone to impose a different interpretation or apply a different metaphor and we would be equally incapable of testing its cogency.⁵⁷

First Person Reports⁵⁸ and Incorrigibility

At PI, §288, Wittgenstein says this:

I turn to stone, and my pain goes on.—What if I were mistaken, and it was no longer pain?—But surely I can't be mistaken here; it means nothing to doubt whether I am in pain.

I do not wish to address in detail the vast subject of first person utterances or the issue of whether they are incorrigible.⁵⁹ I merely wish to show that the thesis I have just argued that introspective reports are often fallible is consistent with what Wittgenstein says here.

Certainty applied to a first-person pain report may be taken in two ways. In first-order terms, which is how the incorrigibility thesis is usually understood, it means the report 'I am in pain' is known with certainty and cannot be doubted by the speaker. Closer to Wittgenstein's view is a metalinguistic version of this. It is that 'know', 'doubt', 'be certain' and 'be mistaken' do not apply to such utterances. They do not apply because these terms all apply properly to epistemically empirical contexts and this is not such a context. An ordinary empirical assertion can be doubted or mistaken and it is open to test by evidence but a first-person utterance about pain is not left open to doubt or scrutiny, at least not on the speaker's part. It makes no sense to say one knows, or is certain of, what is not left open to doubt.⁶⁰ There are other such first-person utterances that often (but not always) have the same feature: 'I think...', 'I remember...', etc. Their content is not insulated from doubt but, in standard uses, doubting that one thinks or remembers something or that it is oneself who thinks or remembers would be like doubting 'I am in pain'.

Let us stay with the case of 'pain' utterances, since they are perhaps the purest cases illustrating Wittgenstein's point. Since 'know', 'doubt', etc., do not apply to many such

⁵⁷ See, e.g. *PI*, §177 and later §598, where he speaks of hypostatizing feelings that are not there, and the parenthetical remark in §321.

⁵⁸ I focus on reports because incorrigibility is an epistemic term. We should bear in mind Wittgenstein's point that 'I am in pain' need not be a report and usually would not be. It would be an expression of pain, like saying 'Ouch!'

⁵⁹ An early supporter of this view was H.H. Price in the 1930s. A modified version was defended by A.J. Ayer in *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays*, London: Macmillan, 1963, pp. 52–81, the original paper dating from 1957. A defence against Armstrong, "Is Introspective Knowledge Incorrigible", *Philosophical Review*: 72, no. 4, 1966, pp. 417–32, was made by Charles Raff, "Introspection and Incorrigibility", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*: 27, 1, 1966, pp. 69–73. This is but a tiny sample of the literature. There was an empiricist alternative to this view even before it was first introduced, holding that introspective reports are empirically based and therefore falsifiable (an empiricist critique of incorrigibility was subsequently part of Armstrong's case, *op. cit.*), but the main assault on it was mounted in the 1950s by J.L. Austin, appearing in *Sense and Sensibilia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, pp. 110–15.

⁶⁰ In *OC*, Wittgenstein appears to allow uses of 'I know' and 'I am certain' in a specialized sense meaning that the report admits of no possibility of mistake or doubt. E.g. see §11, 12, 16, etc.

first-person utterances, it is wrong to say they are infallibly or incorrigibly known. They are not matters of knowledge at all. To that extent, Wittgenstein was not a partisan of the incorrigibility thesis. This nuance aside, even if they are not open to doubt for the speaker, they are open to doubt for the listener. Another party can doubt that someone who is in pain really is—he might be pretending, etc.—and *a fortiori* can doubt someone else's self-attributions of, say, kinaesthetic sensations or certain beliefs or memories.

Evaluating Wittgenstein's Critique

I will focus on evaluating the critique proper, since it is well beyond the scope of this paper to examine Wittgenstein's general approach to philosophical issues or his philosophical psychology as a whole. Indeed, interpreting his writings is itself a significant challenge. I have gone as far as I can in this paper to adduce textual evidence concerning introspection. His critique of introspectionism falls into two categories of argument, ones that are broadly conceptual and ones that appear dependent, at least partly, on his own introspective reports. These two aspects I will try to address.

A typical conceptual argument is his case against the thesis that introspection or inner awareness is perception. I will take it as shown that treating it in this way is incompatible with our normal talk. The typical philosophical rejoinder is to ask why we should be bound by ordinary language. Perhaps the use of 'perception' in relation to inner states would be a helpful innovation. This is rather a big subject and I can only rough out a few points in Wittgenstein's defence. A preliminary point concerns the significant danger of confusion if this is done. One of its consequences is that modelling inner experience on experience of external objects induces misplaced confidence in its stability. However, let us suppose that an advocate of this extended use is prepared to shift her ground. One move would be to stretch the notion of an object so that it is differentiated from objects of sight, hearing, etc. A problem with this is that it is unclear how it could be accomplished. Describing such objects in terms of a string of negatives (non-physical, non-spatial, non-persisting when unperceived, etc.) would be uninformative. A second move might be to accept that inner perception is not of objects. Why not use 'perception' in this way as a 'specialized concept'? But what makes such a concept specialized? It seems exceedingly vague and vague concepts lack predictive or explanatory value.⁶¹ In fact, such a revised concept seems indistinguishable from our much more ordinary concept, 'experience', a perfectly good but vague and ordinary word that has the advantage of allowing us to respect distinctions between sensory perception and inner awareness. Researchers, being theorists, are bound to have their own vocabulary for recording the results of surveys but they must still address test subjects in the language they speak, i.e. ordinary language.

'Perception' is very often used by specialists for the physical apparatus of perception. This is, as far as I can see, unproblematic as long as one is clear on the ambiguity between this and the standard ordinary use. In the standard sense of 'perception' as an experience, things are perceived by people or other creatures, *by means of* their sensory

⁶¹ Shoemaker, p. 271, mentions such a non-standard use by Armstrong but in the end finds it unsatisfactory.

apparatus if you like. No one sees an image on her retina; she sees a pigeon, puppy or sunset. The brain does not ‘monitor’, if a theorist wishes to use that word, images on the retina in the same sense in which a person monitors what is going on in the street.

What about concepts like ‘interoception’ and ‘proprioception’? Alan Fogel uses these terms (as does Stephen Porges⁶²) primarily in relation to the physiology of the brain and nervous system. The nervous system encompasses capacities to ‘monitor’ what is going on in our bodies.⁶³ If we take this language as physical and about physical mechanisms, it is unobjectionable, with the following caveat: such monitoring is not a subject/object relation like that of a person seeing a tree; it is a causal relation. Our mechanism of perception constitutes the physical basis of sensory experience but the latter is not its mirror image. The road to understanding our perceptual apparatus is empirical, that to understanding the nature of perceptual experience, if Wittgenstein is right, conceptual. ‘Interoception’ and ‘proprioception’ can also be used as specialized language for inner awareness (of a sensation in a limb or the location of one’s arm) as long as one avoids confusing such awareness with perception and is aware of the ambiguity between these uses and their uses for a physical monitoring mechanism.⁶⁴

Wittgenstein warns us against mistakes in categorizing the inner in this comment on empirical psychology:

A misleading parallel: psychology treats of processes in the mental sphere, as does physics in the physical. Seeing hearing, thinking, feeling, willing, are not the subject matter of psychology *in the same sense* as that in which the movements of bodies, the phenomena of electricity, and so forth are the subject matter of physics. You can see this from the fact that the physicist sees, hears, thinks about and informs us of these phenomena, and the psychologist observes the utterances (the behaviour) of the subject.⁶⁵

A second conceptual issue concerns the biases that creep into our introspective reports as a result of an experimenter’s suggestions, the peculiarity of test materials (reading letters versus ‘reading’ squiggles) or a test subject’s stabs in the dark at descriptions of what he is or may be experiencing. Wittgenstein sometimes dismisses stabs at meanings as just what someone is inclined or tempted to say.⁶⁶ He sought to bring to the surface pictures or presuppositions that prove misleading in that they misdescribe how we understand some phenomenon. According to Eric Schwitzgebel,⁶⁷ nineteenth century introspectionists like Titchener doubted the effectiveness of naïve introspection and thought extensive training was needed before one could introspect successfully. But, even if introspection based on extensive training were more successful than it is,⁶⁸ it would engender greater bias in introspective reports than in the case of

⁶² See Porges 2011, pp. 77–78.

⁶³ Fogel, discusses this extensively at pp. 41ff.

⁶⁴ I make these mundane and tedious observations because of their philosophical importance. I by no means assert that Fogel or Porges has made or would make such confusions.

⁶⁵ *PI*, §571

⁶⁶ E.g. *PI*, §254

⁶⁷ Schwitzgebel 2008

⁶⁸ See below.

naïve introspection. Being trained to meet a standard is very difficult to separate from being trained to anticipate that one's experience will have a certain character.

I will illustrate this notion of misleading pictures by means of an example from William James, one on which Wittgenstein commented. James wished to establish a psychology of the self on an empirical basis. He rejected the view inherited from Hume that the self is a mere package of inner states and the Kantian belief that it is a purely rational or intellectual posit.⁶⁹ It is inextricably connected with all our experiences and it is 'felt' in them.⁷⁰ Here is what he proposes it (the italics are his):

*Whenever my introspective glance succeeds in turning round quickly enough to catch one of these manifestations of spontaneity in the act, all it can ever feel distinctly is some bodily process, for the most part taking place in the head.*⁷¹

He gives some examples of movements in the head associated with different forms of experience and then adds,

*...In one person at least [himself], the 'Self of selves,' when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and throat.*⁷²

Wittgenstein commented,

Here we have a case of introspection, not unlike that which gave William James the idea that the 'self' consisted mainly of 'peculiar motions in the head and between the head and the throat'. And James' introspection showed, not the meaning of the word 'self' (so far as it means something like 'person', 'human being', 'he himself', 'I myself'), or any analysis of such a being, but the state of a philosopher's attention when he says the word 'self' to himself and tries to analyse its meaning.⁷³

What is his point against James?

A purely rhetorical element is the association of James with the caricature of introspectionism in the preceding paragraph. The suggestion is that introspective philosophers and psychologists put themselves into a kind of daze in which they can bring themselves to say almost anything about their inner lives. We should, again, avoid taking as more than raw material for philosophy just what someone is inclined to say. This may or may not explain the source of such ideas—it is brief and dismissive—but there is more to say than this. A more trenchant criticism is that such theorists bring to their introspective exercises pictures that determine what they 'find'. James presents us with the picture of a mental subject capable of feeling physiological motions in the head. These are to be associated with different kinds of inner state and, indeed, with our very self. One is reminded of homunculus theories according to which a ghostly

⁶⁹ E.g. succinctly at 1890, vol. I, p. 299

⁷⁰ pp. 298–300

⁷¹ p. 300

⁷² p. 301

⁷³ *PI*, §413

miniature viewer or ogler sees what is flashing on the retina. Bringing such pictures to light is often enough to persuade people to abandon them. Wittgenstein treated them as misdescriptions of the language games we play with psychological terms: we *have* experiences; they are not viewings of what goes on in our bodies. The picture smacks of a naïve understanding of mind and body, even James's, though he has a somewhat sophisticated knowledge of brain physiology for his time. But why is it naïve? First, it is not clear whether introspection would come up with reports like those of James in more than a small minority of cases. Secondly, the hypothesis is problematic because it solves nothing about the nature of our inner life or of the self. James does not distinguish clearly between the self and certain sensations. Moreover, his self found in peculiar motions of the head and throat is monitored, or 'felt', by a further ghostly subject or self. What is it and how do we find out about it? Does it consist of more feelings in the head and throat monitored by yet another subject?

Curiously, Wittgenstein goes on to say parenthetically, 'And much could be learned from this'. What could be learned and from what? Is whatever is to be learned drawn from the very inward gazing that he has just ridiculed? It is far from clear but we can take up the question ourselves. Is there something to be learned from James's feat of introspection, something other than a negative lesson? What it does do is focus attention on visceral and locational sensations. James pioneered a hypothesis in psychology that links emotions and social engagement with certain states of the body.⁷⁴ Long a minority view, it now has prominent supporters and has been grounded in powerful physiological theories.⁷⁵ The theorists in question emphasize the importance of such sensations, and not just or not principally our cognitive capacities, in making us human.⁷⁶ Perhaps even the suspect inner ogler has been useful in inspiring research into physical mechanisms that monitor states of the body.⁷⁷

Despite the central importance of conceptual argument for Wittgenstein, some of his comments on introspection appear to be based on introspections of his own. I noted his remarks about the vague and fleeting nature of many psychological processes. There is a conceptual element connected with these observations in that they reflect categorial differences between a physical object or physical property and a mental state, but his comments do not seem to be only conceptual. There is a stunning example in *PPF* of an introspected experience.

I go for a walk in the environs of a city with a friend. As we talk, it emerges that I imagined the city to be on our right. Not only have I *no* reason that I am aware of for this assumption, but some quite simple consideration would be enough to make me realize that the city is a bit to the left ahead of us. I can at first give no answer to the question *why* I imagine the city in *this* direction. I have *no reason* to think so. But thought I see no reason, still I seem to see certain psychological causes for it. In particular, certain associations and memories. For example, we were walking along a canal, and once before, in similar circumstances, I had followed a canal, and that time the city was on our right.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ His view is summarized in James 1894.

⁷⁵ See Fogel 2009, *passim*, and Porges 2009, p. 54.

⁷⁶ This is expressed in particularly accessible form in Fogel 2009, chapter 1, pp. 1ff.

⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*

⁷⁸ *PPF*, §268

Many people will respond—I am one—by saying, ‘I know just what he means.’ The example reminds me of going the wrong way to find the exit from a subway station because I have imposed on the location a spatial memory of a different one. That he or I have or report such experiences, however, is not of philosophical interest. Indeed, if introspection is as vague and problematic as he suggests, even the report of its vagueness is suspect. It is the report of one person only and, for Wittgenstein, it is not of value for finding out about the nature of a state. As we noted, James too carefully acknowledges that his report of the nature of his inner life is that of one person only. For these to count as evidence about aspects of introspection, they need to be compared with many cases on the basis of which generalizations can be formulated. This is not, again for Wittgenstein, a philosophical endeavour; it belongs to the domain of empirical psychology. Still, the epistemology of psychological enquiry is of philosophical interest, so we owe this some consideration.

James thought that introspection was of little value in the scientific enterprise unless one could generalize from many cases. In a short reference to this, he puts the matter as follows:

I think I can [say what I feel when I become aware of the self’s existence] in my own case; and as what I say will be likely to meet with opposition if generalized..., I had better continue in the first person, leaving my description to be accepted by those to whose introspection it may commend itself as true, and confessing my inability to meet the demands of others....⁷⁹

The problem with this approach to generalization is that each instance from which a generalization is to be drawn is something going on in the privacy of a subject. When James invites others to see if their introspections are similar to his, this is just like my finding similarities between Wittgenstein’s story about the location of a city and my experience in a subway station. These instances are not susceptible to inductive generalization in the way that events in the world are. To establish an inductive hypothesis our sample must consist of public information. We need to redefine the sample: we look to people’s *reports* and other *behaviour* as data for empirical analysis. And we need enough such data to constitute whatever counts as an adequate statistical sample. A researcher must also bring to bear cautionary methodological principles, not least among them the sorts of considerations Wittgenstein draws to our attention when he remarks on how suspicious it is that we ‘notice’ certain sensations only when we put ourselves into peculiar circumstances or when we are given concepts in whose light we are to understand what we experience. A researcher can also draw on the increasingly large body of brain and neural research. The same comments apply to therapists.

The value of Wittgenstein’s introspective insights depends on how well they conform with empirical research on introspection. A philosopher-cum-researcher who has undertaken a good deal of such research is Schwitzgebel, recording his results in ‘The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection’, partly in response to a

⁷⁹ James 1890, I, p. 299

revival of introspectionism in psychology in recent years.⁸⁰ One example in philosophy of mind and psychology is Jesse Prinz. Prinz not only embraces introspectionism; he defends the view that inner experience is perception.⁸¹ Schwitzgebel's work is a powerful and comprehensive critique of introspectionist psychology. It is made all the more powerful because, as 'Introspective Training Apprehensively Defended' indicates, he takes the notion of a skilled introspectionist seriously and supports the notion tentatively, but he still finds that even skilled subjects report certain sensations differently.⁸² It would not be far off the mark to say that Wittgenstein's views anticipate such conclusions. For all that, his contribution goes entirely unacknowledged.

Let us remind ourselves, however, that Wittgenstein denied that even informative behavioural research tells us what a psychological state is; it gives us information about psychological states whose nature we already know. This is because we could not pursue an empirical project without knowing the meanings of the principal terms that guide our research. Distinguishing 'what?' from 'how?' in this relatively sharp way may seem dated in a philosophical age that lies so under the long shadow of Quine but it is more defensible than may at first appear. Wittgenstein did not say that the line between 'what?' and 'how?' could not move—quite the contrary⁸³; he denied that it could move within the parameters of a particular enquiry. If it did, the potential for confusion and error would be very great and the results of the enquiry, to say the least, questionable.

An Admission of Omission

I add one concluding remark. Readers familiar with contemporary treatments of introspection may be struck by the absence of something from my discussion. I have made no mention of introspecting sensory or perceptual states. I make no mention of introspecting perceptual experience because, while perception involves awareness, its content is not an inner state that one 'introspects', at least not given our standard concept. My intent has been to focus on those states that are unambiguously (though clearly not in a uniform way) inner: sensations, dispositional states, intentional states, emotions. Perceptions, in the sense of what we perceive, are not inner. Defending this omission is a task for another occasion.

⁸⁰ Schwitzgebel 2008, p. 246

⁸¹ Prinz, *passim*. In philosophy, introspectionism is common. An example is Shoemaker (see bibliography) but he does not consider introspection to be perceptual.

⁸² Schwitzgebel 2004, pp. 66, 69, 70–74, 75; 2008, p. 266

⁸³ *PI*, §354, *OC*, §87. The latter is about more than rules of meaning; it includes all certainties not open to doubt, whether or not such certainties should be treated as rules.

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