Private Language Arguments. Notes for the Reconstruction of a Controversy

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Abstract

This paper tries to reconstruct the controversy on the possibility of private language. First, we analyze “epistemological” trends in the argument (Malcolm, Fogelin) showing their failures. Then, we analyze “semantic” versions (Kenny, Tugendhat) finding they are also failed. Barry Stroud’s criticism of transcendental arguments as refutations of scepticism allows us to discern the common presupposition that weakens these versions. Moreover, this reconstruction allows us to see how Kripke’s deals with the problem of the previous discussion in order to avoid committing himself with this presupposition. We consider Kripke’s Wittgenstein version to be the only consistent version of the argument. We use our reconstruction to afford two of the most important criticisms directed against Kripke’s Wittgenstein: The problem of objectivity of the rule: Can a single individual be right in contradicting communal assent?; and the problem of internal relationships between rules and their applications, allegedly violated because of the role played by communal agreement.

Keywords: criterion, meaning-scepticism, internal relationships, objectivity, transcendental arguments.

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1 This paper is a condensed version of the main ideas sustained in a PhD dissertation in 2007 at the National University of La Plata (Argentina) under the guidance of Mario Presas and Samuel Cabanchik. I wish to acknowledge my debt to them. Also to the assistants to the Seminar I taught during that year at the same university, especially thanks to Anabella Di Pego, Micaela Anzoátegui and Pedro Echaren. I have to mention also Martin Kusch, whose interpretation of Kripke opened my eyes to the logic of previous discussion, see (Kusch 2006). The paper is to be publish in Spanish as “Los argumentos del lenguaje privado. Notas para la reconstrucción de una controversia” en Diálogos, Universidad de Puerto Rico, nº 92 (Forthcoming).
1. Introduction

In this paper we are engaged to reconstruct the controversy about the possibility of a private language aroused with the publication of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953. We propose a historical-systematic reconstruction more than a plain historical reconstruction. That is to say, we try to conciliate in our exposition the temporal development and the logical dynamic of the progressive explicitation and questioning of some presuppositions. The result aimed is scheme of the controversy and of its possible ways out.

To begin with, let’s make a remark on our subject. In the frame of this paper we will understand by private language (PL) any conception sustaining that the conditions of meaningfulness of language can be provided by mental subjective states only, as for instance beliefs. This view is partially justified by PL critics’ conviction that the refutation of the possibility of private language implies the downfall of epistemological scepticism. Moreover, this view, because it does not puts any restriction of the kind of subjective mental state that can be adduced in support of private language, because it clearly strengthen PL’ position, it does not make any injustice against it.

We start analyzing a position represented by Norman Malcolm and Robert Fogelin in different ways, called “epistemological” because the kind of objection it makes against private language. This position has been criticized as inconclusive. Then we analyze the “semantic” version of the argument, represented differently by Anthony Kenny and Ernst Tugendhat. They react against the weak points of the epistemological version changing the sort of objection raised against private language. However we will argue that this version also fails. In the next step of our argument, we consider Barry Stroud’s criticism of transcendental arguments as anti-sceptic strategies, and took profit of it to discern the assumption shared, in spite of their differences and even antagonism, by the previously considered interpretations. We will argue that the difficulty to obtain a conclusive argument against private language must be attributed to this assumption. Because of this, both, epistemological and semantic, can receive a common label, “classical view of the argument” is the one used in this paper. We will argue also that Kripke’s version of the argument avoids the commitment with this assumption. We will show also that two of the most important objections it received do not properly see this, remaining them objections to the argument going along classical lines.

Epistemological versions (Malcolm and Fogelin in our paper) derive the impossibility of private language from the impossibility of establishing the truth or correction of a linguistic use of a term in a context of privacy. Criticism to these versions (A. Ayer and J. Thomson) points to a vicious justificatory circle between subjective and objective statements implicit in PL argument. By making explicit this circle, they show that the very same objection raised against private language can also be made against public language. The next stage in the controversy, semantic versions (we will examine A. Kenny and E. Tugendhat proposals) try to avoid this circle, questioning the presupposition that underlie establishing true or false applications. This underlying presupposition opens the realm of semantics. We show that this proposal is not satisfactory because it either regenerates the circle at the new semantic level or remains involved in circle of epistemological justification. In the next step, we will consider Barry Stroud’s critical analysis of the scope of transcendental arguments. Stroud’s argument allows us to identify the common factor that makes these strategies to fail. Both strategies seek to refute the private language thesis by making explicit certain criteria of meaningfulness that goes beyond private language. They argue that the defender of private language is committed to them because they are implicit in the Privatist or sceptic statements. However, as Stroud shows, this strategy does not go beyond private language and scepticism, because to be successful it would require more than the implication of a necessary commitment. A necessary commitment, Stroud argues, can be fulfilled through bare belief, preserving so the sceptic or privatist position. The refutation of scepticism or private language would require either (i) including among
meaningfulness conditions a factual claim indicating that we know that the
criteria going beyond private language -to which we are allegedly
committed- have been actually fulfilled (by contrast with the bare belief in
its fulfillment), or (ii) a semantic claim including the knowledge of the
satisfaction of our criteria between the implicit meaningfulness conditions
elucidated by the anti-sceptic. Without this, the privatist-sceptic has a way
out of refutation by distinguish between the conditions of the justified use
elucidated as necessary implication of her questions, to which s/he assent,
and the truth conditions of them, that s/he declares not knowing and for
whose justification s/he asks.

We argue that Kripke’s version of the argument, because of its
rejection of truth conditions for meaning, is beyond this sort of reply. However, Kripke’s version of the argument has received an important
amount of criticism somehow independent of this classical discussion. We
will use two difficulties often directed against Kripke as standards to
assess whether our reconstruction is fruitful: (i) the objection concerned
with the problem of the objectivity of rules (ii) the problem concerning
how to understand the internal relationship between the rule and its
applications within a communitarian view such as Kripke’s.

The former is posed by several interpreters of the book of Kripke
on Wittgenstein. The objection goes: Are consensus (agreement) and
correction overlapped? Can a community distinguish between right and
wrong?; can a single individual be right against the opinion of the
majority? The common source of these objections to the communitarian
solution of Kripke is that it puts the intersubjective or social level as the
key to understand the normative dimension (“to be right”) taking for
granted a community is broadly uniform in its answers.2

The latter questions: which is the nature of the relation of rule and
with its instances in the communitarian elucidation? The source of this
problem can be traced back to Wittgenstein’s criticism of “classical
epistemological view” of meaning. According to this view meanings work
as recipients where the application is always already deposited.
Wittgenstein quasi phenomenological analysis of cases of what we usually
call “to follow a rule” gives entrance to the notion of “obeying a rule
blindly” as a necessary step of the process. This goes against the neglected
notion of applying a rule guided by a mental act. Seen from an elucidatory
point of view, the notion of blindly obeying a rule seems to find an account
for the infinity of the applications of a rule, while the social dimension, the
communal agreement, or the necessity of agreement in judgments (PI §
242) accounts for the normativity of our rule following practice.3 The
question concerning the relationship between rules and its cases arises here
usually because interpreters and critics understand that communitarian
agreement operates as an intermediate between the rule and its
applications. If this interpretation were right, then the relation between rule
and its cases would be a contingent relationship, a relationship of an
external character.4

We will use our historical-systematic reconstruction for a better
assessment of Kripke’s version. Our reconstruction makes clear that the
main objections to the classical version arise out of a commitment with an
assumption shared by all of them. Consequently, a position rejecting this
assumption has a good chance of being beyond these objections. We argue
(i) Kripke’s to be one such position and (ii) to be a coherent position. We
argue for (ii) showing that some of the main objections directed against
Kripke’s Wittgenstein do not apply to it because they remain objections to
the argument understood along classical lines. That is to say, we will use
(i) to argue for (ii).

Let’s refer briefly, to complete our summary, to Kripke’s
Wittgenstein. Kripke’s Wittgenstein changes the direction of the argument
through his proposal of the argument of private language as a form of

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2 See for instance (Hoffman 1985), (Blackburn, 2002), (Wright, 1984)
(Boghossian, 1989), (Hattiangadi 2007, cap. 4); (Baker y Hacker 1984).

3 David Bloor analyzes the solution of Wittgenstein in these terms (see
Bloor 1997, p. 13).

4 See Baker G. y Hacker P. (1984a, p. 75, 94 and ff. and 107 and ff.).
ontological (or constitutive) meaning scepticism. Which is of interest in this proposal is that it is not grounded any more on the putative limitations of privacy, be them cognitive or semantic, but, quite on the contrary, in the presumed advantages it would have. Kripke's challenge asks differently than any previous version. His main question is on the possible grounds we could have to refuse than in using a term with the usual certainty we use it (border cases apart), we are not deviating regarding our previous use of the term. This is equivalent to ask, how do you know that your present use (meaning) corresponds with your previous use (meaning)? He makes an unexpected movement, by arising the very key question of classical realism asking for correspondence where it was supposed these question couldn’t even be asked: in the realm of meaning. Why was it so? Because questions concerning meaning were supposed to be about something “happening” in a domain where we have our justified, if restricted, right to omniscience –this is the way consciousness was traditionally understood. So, Kripke's Wittgenstein achievement is an immanent criticism of privacy. From the impossibility of answer this question, Kripke concludes that there cannot be truth conditions for semantic statements. This movement raises the “sceptical paradox” and a “sceptical solution” to it, which involves a refusal to elucidate the meaningfulness of our semantic statements in terms of truth conditions. Instead they are elucidated in terms of justified-use (or assertability) conditions. In this way Kripke’s Wittgenstein abandon, by destroying it, the common assumption of the previous discussion. This assumption allowed avoiding a refutation of private language thesis through Stroud’s sceptical distinction between truth-conditions and conditions of justified use. In Kripke’s new frame there is simply no room for this distinction.

Finally we will focus on how the neglect of truth conditions for meaning helps to avoid the objections mentioned, on the first case dissolving the problem of objectivity and on the second case giving us the key to solve the problem of internal relationship, allowing us to see that the functioning of agreement in judgments is not to play the role of an intermediary.

2. Classical interpretation: the epistemological version

Classical positions are organized around the different answers they give to the question “Why a private language is impossible?” We consider first the answer given by Norman Malcolm. This author presented in 1954 (see Malcolm 1963a) an interpretation so largely influential as questioned. Because of its emphasis it was known as “epistemological interpretation”. Second, we consider Robert Fogelin’s interpretation, who understands the argument along similar lines to Malcolm’s, but he acknowledges the validity of the objections made against it and develops a defense of it on different grounds, although still epistemological.

2. 1 Norman Malcolm's interpretation and Alfred Ayer y Judith Thomson’s criticisms

2.1.1. Malcolm’s interpretation

Warren Smerud has classified Malcolm’s version together with the two more influential version until 1970, Newton Garver’s (1960) and James Carney’s (1960). According to Smerud the common feature of these interpretations is that their main objection against private language is that in them the putative speaker “would have no acceptable means of distinguishing between correct and incorrect use of this putative sign.” (Smerud 1970, p. 23)

Fogelin’s sort of answer to these objections can be found in later developments, e.g. David Bloor (1997).
Malcolm’s interpretation is presented in several lines of arguments, all of them trying to show a failure in the idea of a ostensive definition of a term and of a private rule for the use of a term presupposed according to him by private language thesis.

Let’s start considering some formulations of the idea to be criticized. The canonical formulation of the idea of a private language is to be found in PI § 243, where a private language is thought of as a language in which “a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences -his feelings, moods, and the rest- for his private use” in such a way that “individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.” Such a language is thought as being completely dependent of private ostensive definitions, as Wittgenstein himself indicates as follows: “I simply associate names with sensations and use these names in descriptions.” (Wittgenstein 1953 § 256) Malcolm gives his own formulation to this idea: “Let’s suppose that I did fix my attention on a pain as I pronounced the word ‘pain’ to myself. I think that thereby I established a connection between the word and the sensation.” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 98)

Malcolm’s main objection to such a notion of a private language is derived from its dependency on a private ostensive definition. Such a definition, he demonstrates, cannot establish an standard of correction or a rule of use of a word. Malcolm takes several lines of reasoning to conclude that, in a putative private language there is not a secure way of keeping separated being and seeming right, i.e., there is no way of clearly distinguishing between right and wrong. Consequently, Malcolm insists on the fact that the argument he finds in Wittgenstein “has the form of a reductio ad absurdum: postulate a ‘private’ language; then deduce it is not a language” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 105). We will try to elucidate the premises that underlie this condensed presentation of the argument.

This task was made easier thanks to some interpreters that have pointed out that the argument Malcolm reads in Wittgenstein has two basic presuppositions. On the one hand, it presupposes that if a sign is governed by a rule, then it must be possible violating it unwittingly, i.e. one must be able of thinking one is following the rule when actually one is not. On the other, it is assumed that for someone to think that something is a token of a certain kind (is a case of a rule) when it is not, it must be possible to appeal to something (the rule) to decide whether it is or not a token of a certain kind. Under this interpretation it results that the missing premises are: first, that it belongs to the essence of language to there be rules for the use of words; and second, that whenever there are rules, there are ways of deciding or establishing whether a word has been used properly.

If we wished to present Malcolm’s version in an extremely condensed way we should say that in a language there should be criteria. This condensation is made possible mainly because of the view on the notion of criterion this author holds. In his explanation of this notion we find both the requirements established by the premises elucidated above put together. This is apparent in the following fragment:

that discovery [that a use of a word is correct or incorrect] would presuppose that I have a conception of the correct use that comes

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8 Other formulations of Malcolm are: “I follow the rule that this is to be called ‘pain’” (1963a, p. 100) and “I will call this feeling ‘pain’ and will thereafter call the same thing ‘pain’ whenever it occurs” (1963a, p. 101).
9 Malcolm (1963b) analyses the solipsist assumption out of which arise the other minds’ problem: the claim that someone is acquainted with mental phenomena “from his own case”. There he states that starting from this assumption: “We have not standard, no examples, no customary practice, which to compare our own inner recognitions” (Malcolm 1963b, p. 138).
10 See the reconstruction of the thesis of Malcolm Malcolm in (Thomson, 1964, pp. 23); see also (Smerud 1970, p. 25). In his reconstruction of the argument of Malcolm, Kripke points out that in the opinion of this author: “For a statement of a given type to be meaningful, there must be, as a matter of definition, not of inductive reasoning, a mean of deciding with certainty whether statements of the given type are true.” (Kripke 1982, p 120n.)
from outside my private language and against which I measure the latter. (Malcolm 1963a, p. 104)

Through the notion of criterion, allegedly missed in a private language, we can see what is thought of as to be actually working in a proper language, that is, public and intersubjective. On the one hand, a conception of the correct use and, on the other, some means to justify or measure (Malcolm expresses the same idea in terms of a comparison of the use with a standard) whether the requirements of correction established by our conception of the correct use have been satisfied or not. A little below, Malcolm gives us an additional clue concerning how to understand this remark:

Wittgenstein exhorts us, over and over, to bethink ourselves of how we learned to use this or that form of words or of how we should teach it to a child. The purpose of this is (...) to bring into view those features of someone’s circumstances and behaviour that settle the question of whether the words (...) rightly apply to him. (Malcolm 1963a, p. 112)

We can clearly see here that circumstances and behaviour play the role of conditions of correct use. To state it in another way, to have “a conception of the correct use that comes from outside my private language and against which I measure the latter” is to know a set of circumstances, of public access, that make true the application of a term to one of its instances. In the case of ‘pain’ such conditions are a set of circumstances and a certain kind of conduct that, if present, makes the application of ‘pain’ true. That is to say, the apprehension of the right use of ‘pain’ consists of the grasping of the concept of pain circumstances and behaviour, whose extension works as criteria (or truth conditions) for the term ‘pain’. The ulterior Malcolmian characterization of the notion of criterion as: “the satisfaction of the criterion of y establishes the existence of y beyond question.” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 113), confirms our interpretation.

Let’s consider briefly now how Malcolm shows it is impossible to there be a private rule. He shows first that a private ostensive definition is not sufficient in order to establish the difference between right and wrong application of a sign so defined, and he considers then to have established at the same time that the putative rules of a private language are not rules at all. Consequently, the sign defined through a private ostensive definition is not a sign of a language. We have to restrict ourselves, by reasons of space to the most important argument advanced by Malcolm.

The argument indicates that the allegedly rules of a private language are only “impressions of rules”1. Showing that these impressions of rules are not sufficient to establish the difference between right and wrong application of the defined sign, private language critic shows simultaneously that the putative rules are not rules at all and, consequently, he delivers the conclusion that the sign defined through private ostensive definition is not a sign in a language: the putative private definition is not more than an empty ceremony and not a definition, etcetera.

Let’s consider it closer: if someone thinks to be defining a word through a private ostensive definition, then Malcolm proceed to reduce to absurd this proposal. Malcolm asks which the difference between using properly the rule provided by the definition and merely believing is doing

11 Our own additions are here and henceforth between square brackets [ ].

12 The notion of criterion involved as a premise in his attack to private language commits Malcolm with true conditions for the use of a term. This makes understandable the language of comparison and measurements he uses quite often. This commitment has been pointed out by several critics of his argument as a commitment with a variant of the verification principle. Consequently, out of this notion of criterion, the question that guides his examination of PL is: “how is it to be decided whether I have used the word [ostensively defined] consistently?” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 99) Consequently the examination of the possibility of a PL equates to him to ask: Can there be a private standard con correction (="private true conditions")?

13 Here Malcolm refers to Wittgenstein (1953, § 259).
so is. Malcolm clarifies his argument pointing that in these circumstances the rule couldn’t be anything different from the “impression of a rule”, because once the word was ostensively defined, the exemplar of the sensation is not accessible any more, remaining only a memory of it. Consequently, more than a rule, such a memory would be “the impression of a rule”. For this reason, the critic of private language can even accept that I am now making an application correct according to my best memory. However, the point is that it doesn’t change the fact that because of the sort of thing the exemplar used to make the judgment is (an impression, a memory); the application is merely what it seems to me to be right.

It could be thought that in such a situation there is a way out for the defender of a private language by the path of justification: using another memory to verify whether we are recalling right or to correct it, if it were the case that we remember wrongly. But this way out does not work, because another impression cannot help us to decide whether we remember right or wrong.

This reconstruction of private language is basically an interpretation of two paragraphs of Philosophical Investigations. On the one hand, paragraph § 258 the hypothesis of an ostensive private definition is considered and there Wittgenstein concludes: “One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'.". On the other, paragraph § 265, where according to Malcolm the solution to our problem is to be found: “—But justification consists in appealing to something independent.". Malcolm’s paraphrases of this second idea: “The proof that I am following a rule must appeal to something independent of my impression that I am.” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 99)

2.1.2. Ayer and Thomson’s criticisms

Critics of the argument along Malcolmian lines try to show that the difficulty he finds in private language is not an exclusive difficulty of it, an idiosyncratic problem of a private criterion of correction, but a difficulty of a criterion of correction of any kind. PL would be failed because it doesn’t grant the transition from “it seems such and such” to “it is actually such and such”. This transition would be granted in public languages referring to public objects. Alfred Ayer focus in the notion of test involved in the argument, whose absence in the putative private language supports the refutation of its very possibility. Ayer shows that this notion of a test is under a set of not consistent exigencies. To show this, Ayer assesses Wittgenstein’s private language argument mainly through PI § 258 y § 265, understanding the argument along very similar lines than Malcolm.

According to this reading of the argument Wittgenstein would state in § 258 his criticism to the idea of a private language, because it implies an insurmountable overlapping of “to seem right” and “to be right”, that has as a consequence the downfall of the distinction. Considering the notions of right and wrong essential in relation to the notion of a rule, and that of a rule essential to the notion of a language, the argument reduces to absurd the notion of an ostensive private definition which carries the downfall of the notion of a private rule and establishes so the impossibility of a private language.

In PI § 265 Wittgenstein would indicate the way out to this definition, pointing that what we need in order to maintain seeming right and being right separated are instances of independent justification. In Ayer’s words:

A point to which Wittgenstein constantly recurs is that the ascription of meaning to a sign is something that needs to be justified: the justification consists in there being some independent test for determining that the sign is being used correctly; independent, that is, of the subject's recognition, or supposed recognition, of the object which he intends the sign to signify. His claim to recognize the object, his belief that it really is the same, is
not to be accepted unless it can be backed by further evidence. Apparently, too, this evidence must be public: it must, at least in theory, be accessible to everyone. Merely to check one private sensation by another would not be enough. For if one cannot be trusted to recognize one of them, neither can one be trusted to recognize the other. (Ayer 1968, p. 256)

The conclusion of the private language would establish, then, that the rules of any language have to be formulated in terms of conditions of public access, which would make possible agreement through establishing the correction or not of a use.

Ayer’s fundamental objection to the argument arises at this point. Ayer indicates that the key assumption of the argument, the notion of “test independent of subject’s recognition”, is a paradoxical or incoherent notion. Ayer supports this claim showing that for any instance of appeal we consider it will not have the required independence of elements of the kind of “my impression”, “it seems to me” and so on. Every instance we can appeal for justification will be necessarily mediated by elements of this sort. Ayer argues that every test involves (depends on) recognition.14

Ayer realizes that for private language argument to be successful, the distinction between seeming to be right and being actually right have to be traced in a clear cut way, or stated in other words, that the notion of test or proof at work in the argument has to perform a conclusive reduction of “it seems” to “it is”. The reconstruction of Ayer seems to fit well in

14 See particularly (Ayer 1968, p. 257 and p. 261). Ayer’s point reminds Wittgenstein’s own remarks concerning the grammar of statements about physical objects, in as much as these statements have a criteriological relationship with statements about subjective inner states. Wittgenstein says: “The grammar of propositions which we call propositions about physical objects admits of a variety of evidences for every such proposition. It characterizes the grammar of the proposition "my finger moves, etc." that I regard the propositions "I see it move", "I feel it move", "He sees it move", "He tells me that it moves", etc. as evidences for it.” (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 51 see also p. 9). See also Thomson (1964, p. 30).

Malcolmian interpretation of the argument, remember that Malcolm’s notion of criterion which establishes that “the satisfaction of the criterion of y establishes the existence of y beyond question.” (Malcolm 1963a, p. 113)

The next step in Ayer’s argument concerns the question whether the replacement of the notion of a private recognition for the notion of intersubjective agreement is a good candidate to fulfil with the high standard established by the notion of test. Ayer denies that this movement can improve the situation. That is so because the notion of intersubjective agreement contains the idea of private recognition being questioned in the first step as one of its components. The idea of test, crucial in private language argument, can’t satisfy the required independence regarding subjective recognition that would be necessary for sustaining the conclusive reduction of “it seems” to “it is”, i.e. of the putative subjective recognitions to an objective recognition of the way in which things are.

Now, if the notion of test must be thought in terms of intersubjective recognition, then the notion of test receives an inferential and putative character, because agreeing each others is a fact as any other (then we can distinguish between the fact of agreement and the merely believing we agree without it being so). In Ayer’s words: “It is through hearing what other people say, or through seeing what they write, or observing their movements, that I am enabled to conclude that their use of the word agrees with mine.” (Ayer 1968 p. 257, emphasis added)

Consequently, according to Ayer, the private language argument fails.15

To sum up: if the notion of test is understood in the sense of checked, the privatist Ayer argues that all checking relies on unchecked acts of recognition. If the notion of test is understood instead in the sense that uses of language must be checkable, Ayer argues that this requirement does not necessarily exclude the recognition of inherently private sensations (for instance proposals of memory as a basic semantic and

15 This line of argumentation is still today an important one. See Anandi Hattiangadi (2007, cap. 4).
epistemological device). In as much as such private acts of recognition are at the bottom of every recognition or test: “there is no reason in principle why such acts of recognition should not corroborate one another” (Ayer 1968, pp. 257n.).

Ayer’s line of argumentation has been pursued by Judith Thomson (see Thomson 1964). This author attacks primarily Malcolm’s interpretation of the argument, leaving apart his accurateness as an interpretation of the relevant Philosophical Investigations sections. Thomson emphasizes the link between the private language argument and the possibility of sustaining an sceptical position concerning the existence of other minds (see Malcolm 1963b). From this link as starting point, Thomson extracts an standard to evaluate the adequacy of the argument: refutation of the possibility of private language should provide us the refutation of such a form of scepticism.

Let’s see now the how Thomson assess this version of private language argument regarding its efficacy as an anti-sceptical strategy. Thomson reconstruction of the thesis of Malcolm follows these steps:

(I) It was said that if a sign which a man uses is to count as a word in a language, his use of it must be governed by a rule -here specifically, if a sign which a man uses is to count as a kind name in a language, is must be governed by a rule of the following sort: you may call anything of the kind X “K” and you may not call anything “K” which is not of a kind X.”  

(II) If a sign which a man uses is to be governed by a rule of this sort it must be possible that he should call a thing “K” thinking it is of the kind to be called a “K” and it not to be. (Thomson 1964, 26, see also p. 23)

The third step of the argument is this: there is no such a thing as a man’s thinking a thing is of the kind to be called “K” and it not being so unless it is logically possible that it be found out that it is not so. And (...) there is no such a thing as a man’s thinking a thing is of the kind to be called “K” and it being so unless it is logically possible that it be found out that it is so. (Thomson 1964, pp. 26-27)

According to Thomson Malcolm’s thesis equates to the idea that “where it is not possible to “decide” whether I have used the word consistently the distinction between my having used it consistently and its seeming to me that I have has vanished” (Thomson 1964, p. 27). Consequently, the central point of her evaluation of this thesis is the way in which notions such as “deciding” or “finding out” must be interpreted. This puts us in the terrain we have explored with Ayer, for whom, as we have seen, the argument failed because its inconsistent notion of proof.16

Thomson’s argument continues distinguishing two kinds of scepticism concerning other minds. One of them, the so called “Weak Scepticism”, recognizes that we can never have knowledge of other minds, but we can, however have good reasons to believe there are other minds. By the contrary, “Strong scepticism” neglects both that we can know or have good reasons to believe that there are other minds. The distinction is quite important in the context of Thomson’s criticism, because she shows that the notions of “finding out” or “deciding” involved in the argument can be interpreted in two different ways, corresponding to the senses of scepticism she has clarified. Out of these interpretations two different senses of, both equally plausible emerge:

…the question arises what “finding out” is to mean here. Must it be logically possible to establish conclusively that the thing is not of the relevant kind? Or would it be enough that it was logically possible that one should have or obtain good reasons for thinking

16 This is no surprising because Thomson recognizes as antecedents of her argument connecting PL argument with verificationism in Ayer, Strawson and Wellman (1959), see Thomson (1964, p. 29n.)
the thing was or was not of the relevant kind? (Thomson 1964, p. 28)

Thomson establishes, by different ways, that for defenders of “Malcolm’s thesis” there is no other option than the interpretation corresponding to Strong scepticism, which is a strong sense of finding out, meaning finding out (or deciding) something is or not a token of a kind in a conclusive way. On the one side, Thomson shows textual evidence of the fact that the defenders of the thesis of Malcolm are committed to the strong sense of “discovering”. But, most important, the key consideration for strong interpretation comes from the fact that only interpretation of ‘finding out’ as “establishing in a conclusive way”, allows the argument to be an argument against the possibility of a private language. To put it in in other words: one cannot, simultaneously interpret ‘finding out’ in the weak sense and argue against the possibility of private language.

Let’s consider the reason for it to be so. Thomson points:

For consider LW again: Could it not happen that he should think his present sensation was of the kind to be called “E” -and then later think “Oh, what a fool I am. Now I remember what the sensation was which struck me that afternoon last May. And I was wrong just now in thinking the one I just had was of that kind -it wasn’t like it after all”. It could of course be said: This appealing to further impressions shows nothing unless it produces an impression “which is actually correct” (Thomson 1964, p. 28).

According to Thomson, this implies that whoever is attacking private language across Malcolmian lines has to consider that: “The possibility LW may later have the impression he was mistaken is not to count as the possibility that he should find out he was mistaken” (Thomson 1964, p. 28). The absence of equivalence can be easily showed: the impression of being wrong is logically compatible with the possibility of having been right, instead discovering one was wrong is logically incompatible with the possibility of having been right. If we were to understand “discovering” as “having good reason to think a thing is or not of the relevant kind”, finding out now that I was wrong before would be compatible with the fact of not having been actually wrong. But, in such a case we could still admit that the impression of being wrong is a good reason, although fallible, to decide we have been wrong before. But, as it can be seen, in making place to the weak not conclusive sense of finding out we do not exclude any more the possibility of a private language.

Thomson, to summarize, puts the different requirements together under a general principle:

The general principle is this: A sign “K” which a man uses is not a kind name in a language unless (by I) he has identified a kind of thing to be called “K”, which will only be the case (by 2) if it is possible for him to call a thing “K” thinking it is of that kind when it is not, which will only be the case (by 3) if it is possible to find out whether the thing is or not is of that kind. (Thomson 1964, p. 29)

This principle, in the author’s opinion, allows us to see that the argument against private language considered is a variant of the positivist verification principle: a sign is not kind-name unless it is logically possible to describe the circumstances in which the uses of the sign are true.  

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17 “My impression that I follow a rule does not confirm that I follow a rule, unless there can be something that will prove my impression correct” (Malcolm, 1963a), quoted by Thomson (1964, p. 27); “And if every use of the mark is also a definition -if there is no way of discovering that I am wrong, in fact no sense in suggesting that I might be wrong- then it does not matter what mark I use or when I use it.” (Rhees 1954, p. 83) quoted by Thomson (1964, p. 27n.).

18 See panoramic views on the different formulations of the empiricist principle of verification on (Hempel 1993) and (Ayer 1993a).
Thomson proposal equates to balance the plausibility that Malcolm’s thesis has a reading of some key fragments of Wittgenstein –PI § 258 y § 265 mainly– with the several difficulties attached to the verification principle. To begin with, the question concerning whether there is a non circular way of deciding the applicability of this principle (see Thomson 1964, pp. 30-31). Another, more important objection is whether kind-names for public objects, such as “chair” or “table” satisfy the requirements of this principle for something to be a kind-name. After all, the argument of private language concludes stressing the need of public criteria for any meaningful use of a language. In the jargon of the principle reconstructed by Thomson, the objection goes: “Does ‘table’ and ‘chair’ satisfy the requirements to be a name of a kind in a language, above of this seeming so to a non-sceptic?” The author answers so to this question:

How should I find out whether or not they do -which is not merely a matter of my asking myself whether or not it seems to me that they do? And it should be stressed that unless this is possible for some man, then if the new principle is true, “C” is not a kind-name in any language. (Thomson 1964, p. 31)

As a consequence of interpretation of private language along the lines of the Verification principle, any statement made about something subjected to an sceptic challenge (as for instance the problem concerning the existence of external objects) will contain terms of what we should say that, if someone uses them then he speaks a private language. This is so because of these terms it is impossible to find out (in the required sense) whether a thing belongs or not to the kind the term stands for. This consequence follows trivially of the shape taken by sceptical challenge: the sceptic argues that although it may seem to us that this is a table, maybe it is not; the fact of it seeming so to us does not establish it to be so.

Consequently, it would be statements in a private language any statement regarding which we accept their truth to be independent of the ways we use to establish their truth, any statement of which we accept that their being true is logically independent of their seeming true to us (see Thomson 1979, p. 30).

2.2 Robert Fogelin’ interpretation

It is worth paying attention to one feature of the previous developments. Critics of private language argument stress that the strict justification conditions at work in the refutation of PL affect also public language. So that, they direct to the public criterion missed in PL -the alleged ground for intersubjective agreement- the same request for the justification. In doing so, critics of the argument argue that the external criterion neither can satisfy these high requirements. Because intersubjective agreement is necessarily mediated by our own impressions, the most it can give us is a belief, which can be asked for justification.

It may be useful now to look closer at one aspect of the text of Malcolm where these difficulties where considered and to consider a way out of them proposed by Robert Fogelin, who, taken for granted the validity of these criticisms try to show a difference between private and inter-subjectively public cases.

In fact, Ayer and Thomson’s objections can be seen as a development of some remarks made by Malcolm himself. At the end of his review of the Philosophical Investigations Malcolm reflects on how criteria are applied in particular cases. As we have seen, Malcolm considers the relation between a criterion and the phenomenon defined by it to be a definitional relationship. However, in practice, the notion of criterion functions always with a set of mitigating factors. For instance, pain behaviour allows us to infer the existence of a pain, unless, let say, that pain behaviour obtains in the context of a theater rehearsal. The critical point of these remarks is that it is impossible to make an exhaustive list of the mitigating circumstances which would make defeasible the inference from pain-criterion to pain.
To that extent it is always possible to arise a doubt on the convenience of applying the criterion. It is always possible to conceive a doubt which has not been removed, and that, if it were to be confirmed, would revoke the inference from the occurrence of the criterion to that of the phenomenon defined by it. Consequently, we should ask, how is it thought this notion to be a ground for agreement?

Malcolm answer appeals to our common form of life, understanding for this something like our common nature, that is to say, our shared inclinations to make judgments and our shared lack of imagination. “Our eyes are closed to doubts in similar ways” is the Wittgensteinian ideas that Malcolm reproduces here approvingly.  

Now, is this answer to the difficulty posed by the working of the notion of criterion acceptable? In our opinion it clearly puts in play a double standard. The problem is that this way out through the form of life does not grant a clear distinction between being right and seeming right to us. Because of the problems concerning the application of criteria, intersubjective agreement does not exclude the possibility of collective appearance, or an intersubjective mistake (as for instance all of us calling ‘pain’ to something, on the grounds of a pain behaviour at sight, without realizing it is a sort of rehearsal). The fact we react in the same way does not answer to the question on whether we are justified to do that: what seems right to all could, nevertheless, not being so.

In order to afford this difficulty we have to refer to some of the most consequential versions of the communitarian reading of Wittgenstein: Robert Fogelin’s interpretation.

Fogelin also finds not conclusive the PL argument developed in PI §§ 258 and 265. Although his manner of presenting the arguments is peculiar, his ground for remaining unconvinced are similar to Ayer and Thomson’s. Fogelin calls “public check argument” to the argument developed in that paragraphs, because it is read as rejecting the individual check and arguing for intersubjective check. Fogelin remains unconvinced because he thinks Wittgenstein makes there a mistake in argumentation. The mistake consists of using an sceptical argument of a general scope to reach a conclusion of a particular character. Such would be the case if we were to question the existence of the moon or of any other particular object, appealing to arguments questioning in general the existence of external objects.

According to Fogelin, Wittgenstein’s argument against private language, if understood as the argument of public check, fails because it present an objection against memory or the identification of sensations without consistently justifying the application of this sort of objection to this particular domain, i.e., without accounting why this objection does not spread to other domains.

First, according to Fogelin, this argument raises an objection grounded in extraordinary circumstances, circumstances that contradict our ordinary patterns in the use of words:

How do I know that my appeal to memory is actually correct? Well, this is what it is like to remember something; here my reasons give out. If some further justification is demanded, then I must admit that I have none, but as Wittgenstein says, to use a

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19 See Wittgenstein (1953, II, p. 224).
20 See (Fogelin 1994). In this work Fogelin have presented also one of the first readings of Wittgenstein thought as a form of scepticism (the first edition of his book was in 1976), but this is not the aspect of his thought we are interested in now. See the end-note 10 to chapter XII, (Fogelin 1994, pp. 241-246n.), added in the second edition where he compares his own sceptical interpretation with Kripke’s.

21 Fogelin defines “general sceptical argument” as that which is “independent of any particular issue”. (see Fogelin 1994, p. 179, y p. 147).
22 Fogelin points that the usual answer he finds in Wittgenstein to this sort of objection is that in other domains we in fact don’t hesitate (see Fogelin 1994, p. 180 y p. 241n.).
word without justification does not mean to use it without right” (PI § 289).” (Fogelin 1984, p. 180)

Let us to insist once more that what it is lethal to the argument according to Fogelin is not only that it is heretical regarding ordinary language, but it is not consistently heretical. Fogelin, in a fragment that follows immediately the one we quoted above claims that if these objections apply to memory, similar doubts must apply to the identification of public objects:

To press matters further, we can examine Wittgenstein’s own method for checking memory reports. Supposedly in the time-table example [PI § 265], I can check my recollection by looking at a genuine time-table. To pick out one sceptical doubt of many available, what is my criterion for saying that they match: is it that they seem to match? That doesn’t help, for things may seem to match without matching, so we appear to need yet another standpoint for deciding whether my recollection really matches or only appears to match the real time-table. (Fogelin 1994, p. 180)

This ends with the fundamental difficulty the public check argument has to answer:

I hope that it is understood that I am not advancing these sceptical doubts in their own right, I only want to know the basis for applying them against of the possibility of a private language while passing them by as idle when applied to public language. How can we justify applying a pattern of argument in this selective way? (Fogelin 1994, p. 180)

What would be needed are some reason to restrict the application if this argumentative pattern to the public case, allowing instead the objection to go against the private case. Is it possible to find in Wittgenstein texts some defense of the public check?

Fogelin himself recognizes this to be a controversial question. His answer goes back to the traditional battles between philosophers and sceptics. There traditional epistemology tried to answer to the sceptic through indefeasible knowledge claims. These knowledge claims would be such as not having the minor distance between the way things are and the way they seem to us. Fogelin calls the different answers filling this condition “doctrines of the given”. Only such doctrines allow us to stop the argumentative machine of the sceptic that, on the contrary, would destroy everything it finds. For instance in the Cartesian philosophy the cogito plays such a role: if it seems that I think, then I really think.

Consequently what we need to justify the restriction of the public check argument to the domain of privacy is a doctrine of the given. Is there such a doctrine in the texts of Wittgenstein? Fogelin, recognizing it to be a controversial question, finds such a doctrine in Wittgenstein’s texts.23 Fogelin finds the Wittgensteinian doctrine of given, i.e. the overlapping of seeming and being, in a line of reasoning where Wittgenstein excludes the possibility of the global doubt in a practice. This argument sustains that we cannot conceive of the difference between the fact that all the members of a practice thought they are conforming to it and the fact of all the members be actually conform to it. We cannot

23 The textual evidence adduced by Fogelin is: “‘What has to be accepted, the given, is -so one could say- forms of life. Does it make sense to say that people generally agree in their judgments of colour? What would it be like for them not to? -One man would say a flower was red which another called blue, and so on.- But what right should we have to call these people's words "red" and "blue" our 'colour-words'?” (...) -But what would this mean: "Even though everybody believed that twice two was five it would still be four"?--For what would it be like for everybody to believe that?--Well, I could imagine, for instance, that people had a different calculus, or a technique which we should not call "calculating". But would it be wrong? (Is a coronation wrong? To beings different from ourselves it might look extremely odd.)’” (Wittgenstein 1953, II, p. 226)
imagine to all of us (all, i.e. the participants in a practice) being wrong (for instance in making colour judgments of elemental arithmetical calculations) because of the fact that imagining such a case is equivalent to imagining a different practice. If we imagine a form of life where there is not general agreement in making colour judgments, what we imagine is something different to our practice of making colour judgments, one where these judgements cannot be used to classify objects, although perhaps the practitioner would be expressing something about themselves through these judgments. In Fogelin’s words:

How do we know we are not all continually making mistakes in mathematics? the answer to this it seems, is: "if we were to entertain the idea that we are all continuously making mistakes in mathematics, then it would not longer be clear what is to count as mathematics" (Fogelin 1994, p. 182).

Stated in another way, we cannot consider an objection grounded on global mistake, because this assumption would destroy the practice itself, depriving the concepts involved in it of their sense, making senseless also the notion of mistake. We can restate Fogelin’s Wittgenstein doctrine of the given with few words: although it seems possible to imagine the possibility of a global mistake, when we examine the things closer we discover we cannot.

If that were right we would be entitled to say that Wittgenstein has found a way of restricting the application of the sceptical pattern to the case of sensations, excluding the public case from it, obtaining then a successful argument against private language.

However, unfortunately for defender of the argument of the public check, the history doesn’t finish here. The difficulty of a way out along the lines of a doctrine of given in the communitarian level is that it implies, inadvertently a protection for private language. The argument goes, “we cannot ask whether all the people involved in a practice are wrong...” here Fogelin invokes the limit-case where all is reduced to only one person following her private practice. In such a case, when we ask for a proof showing the terms of this language to be meaningful, the putative lonely speaker can replay that the fact that to all the users of this language (i.e. she herself) they seem so shows that they are meaningful.

Every criticism asking that the putative lonely speaker should convince us that she speaks a language violates the principle to which we are committed, according to which “it is only within an institution or form of life that words have an employment, and hence a sense.” (Fogelin 1994, p. 183). On the other side, to raise here the principle according to which a word has meaning only if some user can show it has meaning, is question begging, “by assuming that every language must be potentially public.” (Fogelin, R. 1994, p. 183)

To summarize Fogelin’s criticism to the “public check argument”: if the argument establishing the impossibility of private language affect also the possibility of private language, then its application to private language is arbitrary. The solution to this difficulty is producing a security cordon around public language, preventing the infection of public language by the sceptical argument, and this is what the “doctrine of given” tries to do. But, unfortunately, the doctrine of given produces also, unwittingly, a way of saving private language. Consequently Fogelin find no conclusive argument against the possibility of private language.24

3. Classical interpretation: the semantic version

24 In Fogelin’s opinion, we have no more than one argument against private language and this we he calls the “argument of training”, which establishes the contingent impossibility of a private language: for being such us, it is in fact impossible self training in a linguistic use, but the very idea of a private language and of a solitary speaker is not in itself questionable. (see Fogelin, 1994 pp. 176-178).
The difficulties we have analyzed motivated that several interpreters try to enter in the controversy by making first a diagnostic attributing the difficulties to an inadequate approach to the argument. So, Anthony Kenny, for instance, tried to show that the difficulties of the argument, in particular the commitment with a principle of verification, arises because the argument has been centered, wrongly, in a discussion concerning the possibility of establishing the correction or truth of a use or application of a term, when what is at stake is the previous question of establishing the meaning of a term, a question that underlie any making of right or wrong judgments. In that way, Kenny tries to construct a properly semantic version of the argument. We will indicate several reasons to be unhappy with Kenny’s argument, which are related to his way he understands “knowing” in the semantic notion of “knowing the meaning”. This, we will argue, produces the reemergence of the vicious circle of justification at a new level. Ernst Tugendhat has proposed another version of the argument along semantic lines. We call it “dynamical semantic version”, because it tries to show that private language is not possible because of different semantic reasons: it would violate the conditions presupposed by the acquisition (learning) of the notions that give place to the circle of justification where the attempts to refute private language along epistemological lines usually get stuck. We will argue this strategy remains nevertheless stuck in the circle.

3.1 Kenny’s semantic interpretation

Kenny thinks that classical PL’s discussion understood that Wittgenstein was asking to the privatist grounds to justify her making true judgments after his private ostensive definition, what couldn’t be done, for instance, because of the possibility of arising sceptical doubts concerning memory. As we have seen, these sort objections affect to the same extent to the user of a putative private language as to the user of a public language. These reconstructions of the argument are grounded, according to Kenny, on a misunderstanding:

Both criticism and defense rest on a misunderstanding of the argument. Wittgenstein is not arguing: “when next I call something ‘S’ how will I know it really is ‘S’?”, He is arguing “When next I call something ‘S’ how will I know what I mean by ‘S’? Even to think falsely that something is S I must know the meaning of ‘S’; and this is what Wittgenstein argues it is impossible in the private language” (Kenny 1975, p. 192)

Consequently Kenny tries to give a semantic turn to the argument. That is, he understands that the crucial experiment to confront the claims of a private language in not at the level of the epistemological claims, as testing of truth or falsehood of judgments, but at the level of problems concerned in the settlement of meaning, that are always presupposed by the former. With the discussion of the problems always presupposed by the epistemological aspect of the making of judgments, the semantic door is opened. The deconstruction of the epistemological interpretation requires of us to be aware of the kind of dependency between the epistemological concept of making true or false judgments concerning an subject and the semantic question of knowing the meaning of the subject we are making judgments about.

To sum up: Kenny’s interpretation sustains, the alleged sign of PI § 258 lack of meaning basically because there was no meaning settlement. The putative private language is ruined before starting, that is to say, the putative ostensive private definition is not a definition at all.25 The reason of the failure of the original definition is, according to Kenny, that an ostensive definition requires a stage setting whose absence in private case

25 See the characterization of Kenny’s argument in (Canfield 2001), the same view is shared by (McGinn 1997, p. 131), (Glock 1996, p. 312) and (Budd 1993, p. 55).
is insurmountable. Consequently, the argument of PI §§ 243-315, must be seen as a continuation of the previous discussion of ostensive definitions (see esp. PI §§ 27-35) trying to show that “in the case of private ostensive definition there cannot be any analogous of the background which is necessary if the public ostensive definition is to convey meaning”. (Kenny 1975, p. 181)

Kenny’s proposal goes through different interpretation of paragraphs of PI crucial to the epistemological interpretation of Malcolm and Fogelin. So according to Kenny the statement of PI § 258: “this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in the future.” y its parallel in PI § 265: “this process has got to produce a memory which is actually correct.” have been misunderstood. Consequently, the key question of the argument is, for Kenny, what it is to remember right? His answer is articulated around two ideas. First, he stresses an ambiguity in the expression ‘remembering’; second, he indicates a systematical connection between the two senses covered by this ambiguity.

Kenny indicates that the expression “remembering” can be used at two different levels. At one level, which is the level the discussion has been about, “remembering” means making true judgments on a certain subject. For instance, to remember right the colour is making true judgments about the colour. But on another level, to remember right is to remember or to know the meaning of a word and this is compatible with the making of some false judgments in the first sense.

Moreover of exegetical reasons adduced by Kenny, where he joints Hintikka criticism of the English translation of Anscombe, Kenny proposes a systematical reason. Kenny points to a systematical nexus between both senses of “remembering” indicating that someone could not remember wrongly, that is to say, to make a false judgment, unless it is taken for granted that that person have some knowledge of the meaning of the words involved.

Now, the phrase of PI § 258 at stake: “this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in the future.” and the corresponding of PI § 265, can be understood as well in the sense of making judgments right, that is to say, making true judgments, recognizing tokens of sensations of a given kind, or can be understood in the sense of remembering the meaning. Kenny finds in the systematical nexus the method to solve this ambiguity. Because of the fact that remembering (knowing) the meaning is presupposed by any making true of false judgments, the argument against private language must necessarily be concerned with the semantic sense of ‘remember’.

In order to show why it is not possible to know the meaning of an expression in a context such as of privacy, Kenny refers to the problems of the term ‘S’ allegedly defined in PI § 258. What the Privatist cannot answer is not “How do you know this is a token of ‘S’? but “What do you mean by ‘S’?”. To reach this conclusion, Kenny considers the possible answers the Privatist could give to this question finding all of them refuted says: “This translation [that of Anscombe] makes Wittgenstein requirement of independent testing for correctness stronger and less ambiguous than it is. This passage does not have to mean that in order to be helpful the page in one’s memory has to be actually correct in the sense of (say) corresponding to an ordinary timetable page. Wittgenstein is perhaps making the smaller point that the page one’s is calling to one’s mind has to be the right page (among all the pages of one’s imaginary timetable dictionary) and that it is no way of telling whether it is.”. (Hintikka, 1969, pp. 423-425). Kenny quotes with approval this note of Hintikka in (Kenny 1971, p. 281n).

The relevant fragment was already quoted: “Even to think falsely that something is S I must know the meaning of ‘S’; and this is what Wittgenstein argues it is impossible in the private language” (Kenny 1975, p. 192)"
by Wittgenstein. The possible answers of the privatist are, according to Kenny: (i) she can say “By ‘S’ I mean this”; (ii) he can appeal to a private memory of S; and (iii) he can mention a non private correlation of ‘S’. (Kenny 1975, p. 193-194)

We will not consider in detail the criticism of these proposals, but directly we will indicate that the fundamental difficulty that Kenny finds in the putative private language is that in all answers: “This is ‘S’” does not satisfy the conditions for propositionhood (...). Since what a given meaning is the same as what gives it its truth” (Kenny 1975, p. 196). Kenny points so that it is not a version of the principle of verification but the requirement of independence between meaning and truth, which Wittgenstein had settle yet in the days of Tractatus, the cornerstone that supports the refutation of private language.

We can now present our own critical assessment of Kenny position. First, concerning the independence between “knowing (or not) the rule” and “making (true-false) judgments” his argument works with to a high standard concerning what it is “knowing the rule (the meaning)”. This should not be surprising because Kenny models this objection starting from Wittgenstein Tractarian requirement of keeping separately meaning and truth. Kenny seems not repair here that this strict context has been dismantled in the PI. In such a way, Kenny wants this distinction to be kept for private languages in a Tratctarian way, obliterating that in the context of PI the distinction cannot be draw in terms of a meaning conceived as an object of knowledge, as it is in Tractatus, then, neither in a public language.

For similar reasons fails the argument of the lack of analogy between the private and the public ostensive definitions. Kenny’s mistake is, in our opinion, that he confuses the target of Wittgenstein’s criticism to ostensive definitions. Kenny seems here to understand that the aim of this criticism is to show that the acquaintance cannot produce the knowledge of the meaning, while the contact with the public object plus training ordinarily produces the knowledge of the meaning, which we should conclude would be something like a disposition to use the sign. To our best understanding, however, what Wittgenstein tries to show in this point is that no object pointed (and a fortiori no object or state of the world) can constitute meaning, in the sense of simultaneously being a guide on how to act and a standard of correction. To put it in other words, Wittgenstein joint exam of ostensive definition (understood as bare exhibitions of objects) and training does not constitute a germinal theory of the minimum requirement of the teaching of meaning (exhibition of the object plus training), but a resource to illustrate which are the criteria through which we judge whether someone has understood a meaning.

The remarks concerning the use of general arguments for particular purposes apply here again. So that, Kenny is obliged to show, in virtue of his procedural, which are the guaranties that justify that someone knows a meaning and not merely thinks she knows it, which suppose providing grounds for the claim to know a particular meaning, and not any other similar to it, regenerating so Malcolm’s difficulties at a new level.

John Canfield has adequately pointed that Kenny’s version of the argument puts the private language argument under too high requirements, the meaning”, interdependency that express an internal relationship between both of them, in as much as the former is a ground for attribution of the later.

There is nothing, in Wittgenstein’s perspective excluding the possibility that someone’s mere contact with the object could be enough for us to judge, because of the application she makes of a term that she knows the meaning of it. But we understand that there is no room to talk of something—the knowledge of the meaning of a term—that would have been produced by the contact with the object.
because our ordinary notion of knowing the meaning simply does not possess the link with justification that is required to this notion in order to be legitimated in a private language, what, or would invalidate ordinarily public language as well, or would give private language a sanitary cordon. (see Canfield 2001, pp. 377-394).

### 3.2 Tugendhat’s semantic dynamic interpretation

Ernst Tugendhat’s interpretation has an special place in the space of the controversy of PL because it is a variant of semantic interpretation, but in contrast with Kenny’s version, it is build recognizing at least partially the legitimacy of the most important difficulties of the epistemological interpretation. Although we are not satisfied with Tugendhat’s interpretation, we find in his interpretation a fruitful insight concerning what is at stake in Wittgenstein’s concept of “criterion of correctness”, although Tugendhat does not fully takes profit of this insight.

Tugendhat recognizes to Kenny the merit of having cleared the terrain from obstacles for a better understanding of PI § 258 allowing us see that this paragraph’s thesis is not that we cannot check the correctness of a memory, but that “we cannot check the coordination between sign and meaning, if it has to be grounded in memory” (Tugendhat 1994, p. 85). However, Tugendhat deviate from Kenny, in a way consonant with the criticism we have made to him in the previous section. Tugendhat is unhappy with this interpretation because he considers it is constructed upon the idea that if there is no check, then there cannot be correctness:

How it is presented by Kenny it [the argument] looks like as is everything would be all right whether instead a sample of the memory of the sensation we would have a sample in perception. If the problem would be only that we cannot check in the memory case whether the sample is the right one, the difficulty would disappear in those cases where we could have a sample available to perception, such as, for instance, is the case of colour-words. (Tugendhat 1994, p. 85)

Tugendhat explains that this is not the spirit in which Wittgenstein presented this argument. Tugendhat finds textual evidence of it in previous versions of the text of PI # 258, but the crucial reason Tugendhat proposes is that in the very PI Wittgenstein himself questions the assumption that supports Kenny’s argument. Wittgenstein himself puts at the same level the appeal to an external object real table sample and a memory sample. In PI § 53 he says: “This table might be said to take over here the role of memory and association in other cases.” And in PI § 56 he sustains: “But what if no such sample is part of the language, and we bear in mind the colour (for instance) that a word stands for?”

By rescuing these references of the previous discussion of PI, Tugendhat (see 1994, p. 85) shows that in PI § 56, Wittgenstein alludes to the same difficulties that we already know through the epistemological discussion of § 258. Let’s see consequently, the whole relevant fragment of PI § 56:

But what do we regard as the criterion for remembering it right? -- When we work with a sample instead of our memory there are circumstances in which we say that the sample has changed colour and we judge of this by memory. But can we not sometimes speak

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31 Unfortunately at the moment of translating into English this paper we do not have the English or the German version at hand, then we had to translate Tugendhat’s fragments from the Spanish edition, to which we refer.

32 Tugendhat refers to Wittgenstein’s notes on private experience and sense data where he finds a passage parallel to (Wittgenstein 1953, § 258) where ‘red’ is the example and nothing is said about memory see (Wittgenstein 1979, p. 52).
of a darkening (for example) of our memory-image? Aren't we as much at the mercy of memory as of a sample? (For someone might feel like saying: "If we had no memory we should be at the mercy of a sample").

These remarks leaves Tugendhat to call for a better interpretation of the expression 'criterion of correctness' in PI, allowing the key question “What it is the criterion of correctness?” to appear differently of how it has been considered. These references to PI –where memory and sample appears at the same level- make clear that although they were asking the very same question, there was a confusion hidden in the previous discussion. The question, maybe because it contains a substantive expression (“the criterion of correctness”) lead the interpreters to look for set of conditions (necessary and sufficient) specifying that someone is actually right as something opposed to that conditions in which someone is actually wrong regarding a rule. Thanks to Tugendhat elucidation the question starts to sound again as “Which is the criterion of ‘correctness’? That is to say, “Which are the criteria of use of the word ‘correctness’ (and its relatives)?” To this question Tugendhat answers, referring to PI § 146: “the application”, and adds immediately: “And application does not mean here application to a recurrent content of sensation bu application to objects” (Tugendhat 1994, p. 86). Consequently Tugendhat understands that when in § 258, it is pointed that if the use of names of sensations were to be grounded in a sensation remembered we would not have any criterion of correctness, what is at stake is not the contrast between the putative (and failed) private criterion, consisting of a sensation recalled and another candidate to be a criterion, consisting of a sample. Instead what is missed there is the “the use in classification” (Tugendhat 1994, p. 86). In Tugendhat’s opinion the defender of a PL cannot clearly see that:

feeling we characterize objects -by associating sensations words to them, either objects that we perceive feeling them, or the very person that feels. The fundamental mistake of the private language theory was to hypostatize the sensation as proper, innerly observable states. (Tugendhat 1994, p. 89).

Now, this view concerning the classificatory function of the statements of sensation generates as Tugendhat himself recognizes a tension similar to that we find when meaning epistemological versions. As we have seen, the answer to the requirement of a public criterion was that that the identification of public objects presupposes the identification of sensations, and in addition it pointed that the identification of sensation was more basic than the identification of public objects and then that questioning it equates to question the possibility of language in general, public, private or whatever.

Tugendhat next step is an attempt to systematize the relationship between “objective statements”, understood as statements about public objects (such as: “my finger moves”) and “subjective statements”, understood as statements that mention a person and her relation of knowledge or belief with a state of affairs (“I see it move", "I feel it move", "He sees it move", "He tells me that it moves") (see Wittgenstein 1958, p. 9 y p. 51). Tugendhat’s view on the relation between both kind of statements is the following:

Between objective and subjective statements there are the following relationships: 1) the objective statements only can be justified by subjective statements 2) subjective statements concerning one and the same objective statement can mutually confirm or invalidate each other. (…) 3) what is grounded by subjective statements only can be invalidated by statements of the same kind (Tugendhat 1994, p. 93).

This have a accurate parallel in the subjective statements in third person:
1) The statement “He psis [ψι = psychological verb]” only can be grounded in statements about the behaviour of the person (…) 2) A simple expression cannot be neither necessary o sufficient condition for the person to be in the state ψi (…) for every psis statement there are a series of statements about the behaviour that can mutually confirm or invalidate each other. (…); 3) the statement “he psis” can only be invalidated by statements concerning the behaviour. (Tugendhat 1994, p. 93).

This attempt to systematize the relationship between both kinds of statements has a paradox build in it, since subjective statements are criteria of objective statements and these are criteria of subjective statements (see Tugendhat 1994, p. 94). It is no strange, then, that the defenders of private language claimed that the cost to be paid in questioning the basic character of subjective statements didn’t leave untouched the objective statements, that is, that the cost of questioning private language is questioning language in general. ¿is there then a vicious circle that deadly affects the strategy developed against private language?

Tugendhat’s answer to this question is a categorical negative. Tugendhat recognizes there is a circle, but he thinks it is not a vicious one because there is a way of entering in it that, on the one hand, does not presupposes it, and on the other, preserves that conclusions obtained against PL.

To show that, Tugendhat appeals to learning, to the fact that subjective statements cannot be taught before than objective statements. If subjective statements, such as “It is likely a…” were to be taught before than an objective statements such as “It is a…” then there would be not difference in the use of the subjective statement regarding the objective statement. What it demonstrates, in Tugendhat opinion, is that the pair of statements epistemologically modalised subjectively and objectively (“It is [probably-actually] a dog”) involved in the circle have as a common presupposition, as a common semantic ground, the simple non modalised objective statements (“It is a dog” “It is red”, etc.).

So far, the contrast between “it seems p to me” and “it is really p” is introduced in a language-game only assuming the domain of simple objective statements. And the contrast between It seems to me that p” and “It is really p” is only possible after the learning of simple objective statements. (Tugendhat 1994, p. 95) Consequently, Tugendhat indicates:

Here the analogy between the criteriological foundation of statements of the kind “he psis” and the criteriological foundation of statements about perceptible objects fails. We can directly explain the meaning of ‘red’ before than the question concerning what kind of statements can work as criteria for the justification of “This is red”. For instance, we merely explain the statement “He is in pain” through objective statements. Here, then, which is primary from an epistemological point of view is also primary from a semantic point of view. An hence the putative circle between statements concerning the external and the internal, between the perceptible and psis states, does not sustain. The common semantic ground that underlie both the language game of the perceptible as the criteriological language game of the psi’s states, is the common ground of the simple statements on the perceptible. (Tugendhat 1994, p. 95).

Tugendhat’s solution improves the classical criticism to private language grounded on the necessity of external criteria for internal states (Malcolm’s proposal, the usual interpretation of PI § 586) finding a way of overcoming the difficulties of the model by making it dynamical. Where the critic à la Malcolm said: “You cannot be there (la privacy, “it seems to me that p”) if you are not also here (the public domain “it is actually p”), trying to establish a relation of dependence; the Privatist answered: “I am here (privacy) and I cannot see how could be there (the public domain)

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1) Tugendhat got his inspiration from §§ 410 and ff. of Wittgenstein’s *Zettel.*
without crossing over this land (privacy)”; questioning the proposed
dependence. The critic of Private language of new dynamic style says now
to Privatist: “You cannot arrive there (privacy) unless you have crossed
from here (the learning of the language game of non-modalised simple
objective statements)”.  
However, unfortunately the diachronic or dynamical semantic
solution does not work either. The problem comes from the fact that it
depends on the narration of learning, and this narration was not deduced
from the justificatory circle in an immanent way. What we mean is that the
circle itself can be thought independently of the narration of learning. The
narration about learning depends so of an empirical or factual statement
about learning. So that, this answer does not clearly see that the problem
we are discussing concerns also the justification of factual statements.
Consequently the answer of the Privatist is to ask now for the justification
of the factual statement of the narration of learning, which rebuilds the
circle, clearly exhibiting the question begging character of this answer.

4. Transcendental Arguments

In 1968 Barry Stroud published an article destined to be highly
influential: “Transcendental Arguments” (Stroud 1968). In his Paper
Stroud analyzes critically the Kantian turn of analytical philosophy in the
decades of 1950 and 1960. The turn consisted mainly in the recovery of
transcendental arguments as anti-sceptical strategies. This Kantian turn
was seen, for many, as having its seeds in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and
in particular private language argument was considered a paradigmatic
element of it.

Peter Strawson was perhaps who more self-consciousness took
again the question of transcendental arguments. This author sustained in
his Individuals:

[the sceptic] pretends to accept a conceptual scheme but at the
same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment.
Thus his doubts are unreal, not simple because they are logically
irresoluble, but because they amount for the rejection of the whole
conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense.

The kind of strategy proposed by Strawson is familiar for us
because of several arguments proposed as refutations of PL. Malcolm’s
version tried to refute the defender of PL showing that the very idea of a
PL contradicts one of the requirements of the very idea of language, the
possibility of establishing that a use is correct. In another version Malcolm
himself linked the proposal of a PL with scepticism concerning other
minds showing how the defender of PL only can make sense of her own
language if she posses a criterion of correction and that thinking of a
criterion of correction necessarily implies thinking of another speaker, with
another minds, etc. In semantic versions it was tried to show that the
notion of making a mistake presupposes that of “knowing the meaning”,
and it was argued that the defender of PL cannot satisfy the exigencies of
this notion, since it requires an independent criterion of correction,

34 See textual evidence for this assertion in Wittgenstein’s texts, for
instance: (1953, § 6, § 495); (1958, p. 12, p. 14, p. 97; 1974, p. 188, etc.) Several
interpreters have stressed Wittgenstein’s remarks concerning the contingent
character of the learning of language, see (Baker y Hacker 1984b, p. 31), (Glock
1996, p. 112); (Kenny 1975) and (Malcom 1963a, p. 112).

35 (Strawson 1959, p. 35) The following Kenny’s fragment leaves to
perceive a similar objective than Strawson’s: “The same philosopher have always
taken for granted that our knowledge of our experiences can be expressed in a
language that, at least to ourselves, and that the possibility of this expression does
not presuppose any acquaintance with the external world or other minds”. (Kenny
1975, p. 179) To show that the knowledge of my own experiences does not have
required logical independence regarding the knowledge of the external world and
of other minds undermines the common soil of many traditional philosophies.
indispensable condition to make sense to the idea of ‘knowing a meaning’ and it was found not possible in the restricted stage setting of a private language. Tugendhat’s view is perhaps the one that presents more openly its shape as a transcendental argument. This author indicated that the circle between subjective and objective statements, where the possibility of a PL can get shelter, excludes in fact PL, because of the common semantic ground necessary to enter into the circle, namely, the learning of non-modalised objective statements, understood as a necessary condition of any staying inside of the circle of justification.

We have also examined several answers to these refutations. Most of the claim that the Privatist can draw the required distinctions as well as they can be drawn in public language. In Ayer’s words, the defender of PL claims that these distinctions can be made in the private domain with nor less security than in the public one. Judith Thomson, in a similar vein, argued that what underlie the attack to PL, in Malcolm’s version, is a variant of the principle of verification according to which if any statement makes sense it must be possible to establish its truth. But, if we have to consider the reliability we can give to the procedures we use to establish truth in ordinary public language -grounded in good reasons- they are not strong enough to exclude PL. In our assessment we denied a public practice to be in a better position to establish a criterion of correction of the kind allegedly missed in PL. When considering the dynamic version of semantic line, we pointed that the defender of privacy would find questionable the necessary appeal to learning, because it is introduced as a factual premise.

The controversy is clearly organized around the key notion of criterion of correction. What divides both parties is that the critics of PL are committed with the necessary existence of a criterion of correction going beyond PL, while on the side PL’s defenders they recognize at most that it seems to there be conditions of correction going beyond PL, but they do not find nothing proving that they really go beyond private language.

Is there an argument reaching what critics of PL claim: that is that if there is language, then there is a criterion of correction whose satisfactions goes beyond PL, excluding then it to be merely believed as satisfied? The amount of difficulties accumulated justifies considering closer the kind of argumentation at stake.

4.1. Stroud’s criticism to transcendental arguments

The objection raised by Barry Stroud in the article we have mentioned can be seen as a generalization of Thomson’s criticism to Malcolm’s version of the argument, in as much as, while the latter hits on a particular version of PL argument, the former’s criticism affects directly the limits of any transcendental argument. In a particular way, the objection that Stroud is arising against transcendental argument was implicit in every answer we considered against to refutations of PL possibility. All of them have pointed that the premises through which we arrive to the refutation of the Privatist couldn’t be sustained unless some form of private language were accepted or, which is more or less the same, that they could not be sustained with the required security to refute the Privatist’s position.

Along this conclusion’s line, Stroud have raised an objection to several proposals of transcendental arguments believed to be refutations of scepticism in several fields, pointing that transcendental arguments only can grant the transition of belief to another, necessarily implied by the former. But this, in Stroud’s opinion, leaves untouched the terrain where the sceptic moves, who can ask now for the justification of this belief. Stated in another way, Stroud makes clear that transcendental arguments are not stronger enough to prove a necessary existence. Because of that, they cannot be used to refute the sceptic who asks: “How can we know that what we are forced to believe could not be always false?”

However the most important point in Stroud work is not only that he has pointed this difficulty, but, mainly that he has clearly established that several of the proposed transcendental arguments reaching anti-sceptic
depends on some version of the principle of verification and not on the transcendental argument, as claimed. The verification principle required would establish that the meaning of certain expressions necessarily imply the existence of other entities.\textsuperscript{36} But in such a case, Stroud prevents us, it is the verification principle and not the transcendental argument which makes the work. Now, in the Kantian utilization of Transcendental arguments, the weight of the answer to the question for the justification of our using the concepts we discover as necessary conditions of our experience, was on the “transcendental deduction of categories” responsible for establishing the thesis of the transcendental ideality of the objects of our experience. Stated in another words: “In general answer to the question: What are the necessary conditions for X? Does not tell one way or the other about the answer to the question: Do these conditions obtain?” (Stroud 1968, p. 254)

His paper starts questioning some anti-sceptical arguments obviously failed, such as: “There is a tomato there, your wife also see it.”, since it depends of a factual premise (“your wife also see it”) and the sceptic can arise new doubts about it. He continues then examining more sophisticated versions of anti-sceptical arguments, such as those linguistically grounded, showing eventually that the more sophisticated does not essentially improve the rough version.

The so called paradigm-case argument is a refinement of the obviously wrong rough version. It is grounded in a special claim, modeled on the best perceptual conditions we can obtain. These are considered “paradigm-case” and allegedly linked with meaning. Consequently, the argument goes: “if this (for instance, to perceive a tomato in the clear light of day, when other people say they can see it, being it at hand, touching it, etc.) is not a case of knowledge, then nothing is”. Since circumstances like this obtain frequently in ordinary life, and the sceptic does not discuss that, it would follow that we know that there is tomatoes and consequently material objects.

But Stroud is unhappy with this argument, because the most it can prove is, in fact, the truth of certain conditionals describing the paradigmatic case, obliterating that it is precisely because of the truth of these conditionals that sceptics can arise a sceptical challenge from one or two examples:

It is not a sufficient refutation of the sceptic who doubts that \( p \) to present him only with a conditional to the effect that if \( \neg p \) we couldn’t possibly do \( A \). What is in question is whether we ever “validly” or “justifiably” do \( A \). (Stroud 1968, p. 244).

Thus, for the “paradigm-case argument” to be conclusive we need an additional premise. It could be, for instance, that we know sometimes, but this would be a factual premise, trivially begging the question against the sceptic. A more sophisticated proposal would a theory of meaning establishing that “at least for some words, if those words are to have the meaning they have in our language, there must actually be thing or situations to which they have been, and perhaps still are, truly applied.” (Stroud 1968, p. 245) The subsequent argument makes clear why a strategy conceived on these grounds necessarily fails.

The analysis of more sophisticated arguments, such as Strawson’s, reaches the same conclusion. Stroud shows that also in these cases we cannot take a purely descriptive step from the way we think about things to the way things are.

Consequently, the anti-sceptic arguments that proceed by elucidation of the conditions of meaningfulness of our discourse require in general the addition of a supplementary premise of one of the following kind:

\textsuperscript{36} It is worth mentioning Strawson’s own position change as a consequence of Stroud’s criticism; (see Strawson 1985, chap. 1 “Skepticism, Naturalism and Transcendental Arguments”).
(a) or the argument requires a factual premise that establish that we actually know in certain cases that the criteria have been satisfied (vs. merely believing to know they have been satisfied).

(b) or it is committed with a form of the verification principle: for instance, “whether the notion of particular object makes sense, the we can know it has been satisfied”

We can now get a scheme of the conflict between the transcendental anti-sceptic and the sceptic. The difference is: the sceptic sustains that (i) a certain kind of propositions makes sense and (ii) that we cannot know whether they are true. On the contrary, the anti-sceptic sustains that there is a logical inconsistency between the two commitments of the sceptic, in such a way that on the one side (ii) has to be false for (i) to be true; an on the other side, she considers that the truth of (i) is a necessary condition for the sceptical question. Because of this contradiction, no sceptical challenge would have been formulated at all.

But, as we have seen, the claim of (ii) to be false, i.e., the exclusion of the statements from meaning when they are supported by bare belief, has not been deduced in an immanent way from the sceptical challenge, but from the verificationist premise hidden in the transcendental argument. Then, the ground that supports the refutation of scepticism is the verification principle and not the transcendental argument, as it is claimed.

The refutation of scepticism would be dependent so, of a claim whose controversial character has been testified by the history of logical positivism. However, even if we were to take for granted the possibility for some transcendental strategy of implying a sort of principle of verification, this would not be enough to refute scepticism in a conclusive way. Stroud points:

If only a restricted class of propositions is in question, it is always open to the skeptic to accept the argument and conclude that talk about, say, the continued existence of unperceived objects really doesn’t make sense to us. Although he wouldn’t and needn’t say this at the outset, he would be forced into it by an argument that relied on the truth of verification principle. Far from refuting skepticism, this would make it stronger. Not only would we be unable to know whether the proposition allegedly expressed by a certain form of words is true, we would not even understand these words. (Stroud 1968, p. 251)

In such a case the sceptic can conclude that the region of discourse regarding which the principle of verification would have been implied, for instance discourse concerning external objects or other minds, dos not make sense.

Thus, providing a refutation of the sceptical position would require developing a completely general anti-sceptical argument, that is to say, concerning the conditions of possibility of any language or discourse. This argument’s required generality could be achieved if the argument does not refer to any particular kind class of propositions but to those propositions allegedly necessary for the existence of any language. These propositions couldn’t be denied truly by anyone and its negations cannot be asserted truly by anyone. Stroud calls the “privileged class” to propositions of the kind.

Privileged class propositions are a subset of the class of propositions that has a self-guaranteeing character, whose truth condition obtains with the assertion of the proposition. For instance, Descartes cannot assert truly that Descartes does not exist. However, the proposition referred to does not belong to the privileged class, since it possesses a restricted self-guaranteeing character. On the contrary, propositions belonging to the privileged class should possess an self-guaranteeing character that we could call “not-restricted” or “absolute”: “There is no one, whoever he might be, whatever language he might speaks, or whatever class of people he might belong to, who could truly denied any of the members of the privileged class of propositions.” (Stroud 1968, p. 253)

However, it is worth remarking that the propositions belonging to the privileged class because of their absolute self-guaranteeing character,
those becoming true because of the fact of being asserted by anyone, are not necessary propositions. So that, the proposition, “There is a language” a pretty good putative member of the privileged class – it cannot be truly denied by anyone- but is not a necessary truth, because we can imagine circumstances where it is not true: it was true and probably will be true in the future, that that there is not language.

With the propositions of the privileged class transcendental arguments seems to find a dimension similar to Fogelin’s “doctrine of the given”, i.e. an overlapping between seeming and being:

In general, giving an answer to the question, “What are the necessary conditions of X?” does not tell one way or the other about the answer to the question “Does these conditions obtain?” But in the special case of asking for the necessary conditions of there being some language, giving an answer to the first implies an affirmative answer to the second. (Stroud 1968, p. 254)

The quid of this question is that privileged class propositions would allow to to refute conclusively the sceptic if the propositions the sceptic claims that cannot be justified on the grounds of experience belonged to this class. Now, this question would require to be proved, but the proof in question is difficult because of two reasons. On the one side, because what would include a discourse concerning the conditions of language and the possibility of meaning in general (vs. what belong to particular languages or discourses) is so vaguely defined that it is not easier to be certain about what it includes and what it not includes. However the main reason for the failure of this strategy is that for any putative candidate S claimed as a member of the privileged class, the sceptic can reply that “it is enough to make language possible if we believe that S is true, or if it looks for all the world as if it it, but S needn’t actually be true” (Stroud 1968, p. 255).

So that, a candidate-proposition to be a member of the privileged class, such as “there is external objects”, going beyond scepticism and private language, is absorbed by the sceptic declaring he believes in the existence of external objects. To that extent, the sceptic can accept that when she asks whether there are external object, her own asking makes true that she has a belief in the existence of external objects, and that if it were missed it would imply her discourse’s lack of meaning. However, since this is not a necessary proposition, the sceptic can raise a question for the justification of this question. In that way, the sceptic attacked for transcendental arguments linguistically grounded finds a way out distinguishing the conditions of paradigmatic or justified use of a language and the conditions in which this use is true. To sum up, the sceptic distinguishes between conditions of paradigmatic or justified use and the truth conditions of a use, she accepts to be committed to the former and ask for the justification of satisfaction of the latter.

In conclusion, the general linguistically grounded transcendental argument fails in the same place that the rougher versions does. The most it can prove is that, as an answer to a question of fact, a certain feature (concept, belief, etc.) is a necessary condition of our experience, thought or discourse. However it does not answer the question of right concerning whether we are justified to make use of this feature, concept or belief as we do. Once more, to answer to the question of right would require either a premise stating that we know that the content of our beliefs is satisfied, which is a coarse way of begging the question, or either stipulating among the conditions of meaningfulness, as necessary requirement, that we have to know that know they have been satisfied. But, again, it equates to establish a principle of verification that makes useless the transcendental argument.

Without the principle of verification, the most that can do transcendental arguments is to carry the interlocutor from a given belief to another belief necessarily implied by the former. In any case, the most that can be proved is that some of the propositions about what we believe, or concerning the way things appears to us, belong to the privileged class. For instance, the argument can show that it is true and even self-guaranteeing, that I believe to there be material external objects. But it dos not prove the
existence of material objects, that is to say, it does not prove that the sceptical question –or the private language hypothesis– requires something beyond itself. To state it in other words: the truth conditions of the propositions of the “privileged class” –elucidated by the argument– are subjective mental states; hence, the argument is not strong enough to exclude the possibility of a private language. That is why the sceptic or the privatist can now restate her commitment with the conditions of justified or paradigmatic use, which can include believing that there are external material objects, declaring now not to know the conditions that make true this paradigmatic or justified use.

5. Kripke’s Wittgenstein’s sceptical reformulation of private-language argument

We can now consider Kripke’s sceptical interpretation of Wittgenstein. The problematic context we have reconstructed gives us a clear view of the reorientation of the discussion that it implies and at the same time it gives us a hypothesis on its possible motivations.

We can appreciate the change in the direction of the argument imposed by Kripke in his stress on the problem at stake: “The main problem is not, “How can I show that the private language –or some other special form of a language– to be impossible?; rather it is, “How can we show any language at all (private, public or what-have-you) to be possible?” (Kripke 1982, p. 62)

Our reconstruction of the problem, where the different attacks to private language have failed because they couldn’t avoid the generalization of the criticism directed against private language, affecting also to public language, and a fortiori to any language, makes this formulation to look hopeful. On the other side, Stroud’s criticism to transcendental arguments shows that the key for this generalization is that the objection raised against private language can be traced back to the account of the criterion required to reduce appearance to reality, in terms of truth conditions, of necessary and sufficient conditions, which, when asked also to the public language undermine it too.37

It is time now to examine the peculiar Kripkean reconstruction of Wittgenstein’s arguments along the lines of a challenge, an argument and a sceptical paradox keeping in mind the previous discussions and the problems we have found on it.

The “sceptical challenge” of Kripke’s Wittgenstein is the following. Let’s suppose we are about to make an arithmetical calculation, say ‘57+68='. We are almost immediately inclined to answer ‘125'. Let’s suppose also that in the past never were performed additions with elements bellow 57, which, at the end it is a reasonable assumption, since no matter the additions have been performed, there must be a maximum for them. There we are, when we are interrupted by a sceptic asking how we know that this (‘125') is the rights answer. The sceptic declares to have been observing us and to have got the impression it was not addition but quaddition the function we were computing. Quaddition, she informs us, is a function that delivers identical answer that addition, when applied to arguments below 57, but that in any other case yields ‘5'. According to the sceptic, we should now answer ‘5'.

The question is to establish who is right. She or us? Can we justify that the answer we are inclined to give is the one we should give to agree with our past use and past intentions? The formulation of the question of the sceptic is strange, but it can be equated to this perhaps clearer question: how do we know that we have not changed the rule we have been following? It is worth remarking here that the question of the sceptic is

37 It is worth remarking that the criticism of private language does not seem to leave room to any other option than to conceive the criterion of correctness along the lines of sufficient and necessary conditions. Otherwise, the criterion offering less than that, the deliverances of criterion would leave room open for interpretation, that is to say, for what seems to us, undermining the putative reduction of seeming to being.
raising the traditional questions of realism, usually raised regarding the external world, in the terrain of our mental life. So the sceptical question is a tantamount to ask: how do you know that your present use corresponds to the rule you have been following before?

The sceptical question introduces us in an examination of our past mental life and behaviour to show that the answer was implied, determined and normatively obliged by them. If we can exhibit this fact to the sceptic, then we would be justified now to answer 125. If we cannot exhibit it, then our inclination to answer 125 instead of 5 would be at the level of “an unjustified leap in the dark”. (Kripke 1982, p. 10)

Kripke, finds, after a dense argumentation know as “the sceptical argument”, which is not of our concern here, that the sceptical challenge cannot be satisfied, since we cannot find facts determining us, causally and normatively, to answer ‘125’. Hence Kripke propose to interpret PI # 201: “...no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.” as making reference to the lack of facts justifying the application of a rule. To state the same point with other words, Kripke’s Wittgenstein sceptics neglects that there can be facts constituting our meaning one thing instead of another, or in a more technical vein, it leads us to refuse there can be semantic facts.

It is important to understand how a sceptical challenge can reach conclusions of this ontological sort. The sceptical challenge we have considered is intended to be of an ontological or constitutive sort. It contrasts with epistemological scepticism dominating the scene of classical discussion. Both forms of scepticism would answer negatively to a question such as: “Can you justify your belief that you mean now the addition by ‘plus’ appealing to a fact concerning your past intentions and behaviour establishing that you mean addition by ‘plus’?”. There are however a crucial difference when we consider the kind of reasons both forms of scepticism offer as support for their negative answers.

Epistemological scepticism understands that our actual cognitive capacities and the available evidence are insufficient to establish justified opinions of a certain kind. In the case of epistemological semantic scepticism, the formulation of the question that makes explicit the grammar of the challenge is “How do you know that this particular application (‘125’ in our example) corresponds now to this concept/rule (addition)?” That is to say, for what it matters to epistemological scepticism, it does not neglects the existence a matter of fact constituting our meaning addition, the problem consists in that we cannot know it now.

By contrast, ontological or constitutive scepticism understands that the quoted question is a case of a more general one: “Which are the facts that constitute your meaning something through a word or sign?” The reasons why the ontological sceptic answers negatively are deeply different to that of the epistemological sceptic: we cannot justify our belief because there is not matter of fact constituting our meaning one thing instead of another. In the first case, we cannot justify our belief because we couldn’t really know which our past meaning was. In the second case, we cannot known, not because of a limitation of our cognitive capacities, but because of limitation of reality itself: it is an argument destined to show that reality cannot contain

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38 See one approach to this problem in (Karczmarczyk 2007b).

39 The sceptics’s challenge concerning our certainty goes to the metalinguistic sense whether ”’plus’, as I intended to use it in the past, denotated a function which, when applied to the members I called ‘68’ and ‘57’, yields the value125.” (Kripke 1982, p. 8).

40 The formulation of the text is mine. Kripke explicitly refuses Wittgenstein’s problem to be an epistemological one: “The problem is not “how do I know that 68 plus 57 is 125”, which should be answered by giving an arithmetical computation, but rather “How do I know that ‘68 + 57’ as I meant it in the past should denote 125.” (Kripke, 1982, p. 12).
any fact playing the role we are inclined to assign to the acts of meaning: the role of standard against which measure our semantic affirmations.

To be able to reach ontological conclusions, Kripke’s Wittgenstein sceptics makes some concessions to her interlocutor in such a way the sceptic allows the challenged to conceive herself as an idealized epistemic subject, allowing her to claim even omniscience. The sceptic concedes her interlocutor to have regarding her own past mental life and behaviour the same kind of access that the very God would have concerning them (see Kripke 1982, p. 14). The sceptic’s interlocutor is so in conditions to detect every possible relevant fact. The ontological sceptic is insidious, but not in the style: “Are you sure it is this what you thought or made?” -what would make her to become an epistemological sceptic- but in the style: “Ok, this is what you thought or made: Could you show me now how this establishes that you meant addition and not quaddition? Thus, the challenge is constructed as if not even God could distinguish between the hypotheses that we meant addition and that we meant quaddition. It is this what allows the sceptic to reach ontological conclusions: if in these conditions we cannot find some facts determining us to answer ‘125’ it is because there cannot be no such facts.

It is worth insisting in the peculiarity of Kripke’s Wittgenstein change of direction of the argument of PL. I can be done showing the different role played by the “Cartesian truth-conditions”, (i.e., of the mental states presupposed as an standard of correction by the privatist) and Cartesian assumptions in general. Quite on the contrary to what happened in the classical discussion, Cartesian truth conditions are not questioned by Kripke for their Cartesian side but for their truth conditions side. Cartesian assumptions are stylized (and not straightaway refused) through the metaphor of omniscience or idealized epistemic conditions and thus internally overcame.

When Kripke indicates that in his opinion Wittgenstein’s argument is not oriented to show that private language is impossible but instead how is possible in general, Kripke indirectly points to the perspective from which language is in general impossible. This perspective is the account of the conditions of meaningfulness along truth conditions lines. In Kripke’s Wittgenstein account the assumption shared by all those involved in the controversy of private language is made explicit, refuted and eventually abandonment.

In order to find a solution to the outcome of the sceptical challenge that seems to make impossible any language (sceptical paradox), Kripke indicates that this is the view of the philosophical common sense, the view philosophers attribute to common sense, and not properly the common sense view of the ordinary speaker. Consequently the way out of the paradox consists in the reconstruction of the common view of ordinary speakers.

Kripke calls this reconstruction “sceptical solution”. It consists on the abandonment of the understanding of the functioning of semantic discourse along the lines of truth conditions to replace it for its understanding in terms of assertability or justified use conditions. With this change in mind, it becomes clear that Stroud’s objection has no room in the frame of sceptical solution. The sceptical solution has a cornerstone the impossibility of these putative missed truth conditions on what rested Stroud criticism. The sceptic à la Stroud cannot anymore accept the commitment with the conditions of justified use (such as “I believe there are public objects” for instance, for the proposition “There are public objects” putatively implied in her own sceptical questioning) and ask immediately after for the legitimacy of her commitment with such beliefs, in as much as the propositional content of them, what is believed, has truth conditions going beyond his merely subjective states. The truth conditions frame, inside which these questions made sense have completely collapsed.

The sceptical solution proposes to replace the characteristic question of the understanding of the conditions of meaningfulness along truth conditions lines “which are the circumstances that make true a statement assertion?” For another two questions “under which circumstances is a statement asserted justifiably? on the one side, and which is the role of this assertion in our lives?, on the other. (see Kripke
1982, p. 73). In fact, the whole work of the Kirpkean sceptic can be seen as a solution to the problem of how satisfy the requirement of a duality of perspectives needed to distinguish between seeming right an being right, avoiding to introduce again the truth conditions. In particular, it does not reintroduce this duality of perspectives through some robust elucidation of the expression “criterion of correctness”, i.e., those solutions that gives a nature of some kind, to the criterion. Instead, the right assessment of the sceptical solution requires to realize that it gives a primitive or basic character to the judgments of correction made by the speakers, for which it proposes not explanations or further understanding. The brick out of which is build up the sceptical solution is the very fact from which it started: we are inclined to make normative judgments (from which the answer ‘125’ to ‘57 + 68’ is no more than an example).

First person’s assertability conditions entitle the speaker to give any answer that struck her as correct. In third person, assertability conditions entitle a speaker A to assert that another speaker B means with a sign the same than her, whether the speaker b gives approximately the same answers that speaker A would give in similar circumstances. As we can see, assertability’s conditions in first person do not put any restriction to the speaker, since these restrictions would require the truth conditions that have been refused. Hence, for a speaker considered in isolation, everything that seems right for him would be right. But first person's assertability conditions does not suffice to elucidate how is it possible a language. This is the Kripke’s version of “the private language argument”: what is needed to make room for a judgment about the mistake of a speaker (to distinguish between what it seems right and what is right) is the judgment of another speaker about the judgment of that speaker, making a third person semantic statement. But the judgment of this third speaker, does not have granted her adequacy or correctness, since the sceptical argument showed nothing could guarantee it, because the lack of truth conditions.

The frame is completed with one general condition, that does not belong to the assertability conditions but without which these would have not any point: between human beings, assertability conditions take place in communities which generally agree in their answers. This makes understandable that disagreement have consequences, because of a force which is not now semantic, but social (see Kusch 2006, cap. 2), and that semantic attributions work as the attribution, conservation or refusal of a social status, which allows to include an individual as a member of a community, delegating the performance of certain activities to her.

We can only consider briefly the objections to Kripke’s Wittgenstein we mentioned at the beginning. To begin with, the objection that states that in the communitarian context there is no room for distinguishing between seeming and actually being right, does not apply here. The objection only apply to those assuming that the meaningful conditions must be elucidated along truth conditions lines, communitarian truth condition in this case, but cannot be raised against who have demonstrated that the very idea of truth conditions to semantic statements is absurd, and is for a change to assertability conditions. Hence, in the sceptical solution there are no communitarian truth conditions. Inside sceptical solution, it is not necessary to condemn to non-sense to these judging differently than the majority. Nothing in sceptic solution excludes even that, in certain circumstances, the majority could judge that the discordant individual is right against the community assent. But to establish when and where is not a philosophical question.

The basic or primitive character of semantic judgments is also the key for solving the problem of the internal relationships between the rule and its applications. The solution to this problem is to be found, again, in the nature of the change implied by the step from a position grounded in truth conditions to a position grounded in assertability conditions. The problem of the relationship of the rule and its applications in the frame of a communitarian view of meaning and rules arises because the communitarian elucidation makes the situation to appear as if no speaker would be able of know which are the steps of a certain rule, because it (which is the right answer to a certain problem) seems to be dependent of the contingent fact of others members of the community eventually agree
with the answer given by a particular speaker. It worth stressing on the primitive character the judgments of correctness have in the new assertability conditions frame. That is to say, the communal agreement is not integrated in the assertability conditions as a criterion the speaker should use to measure what strikes her as right. The basic character of first person judgments of correction appears reflected in third person from the fact that absence of doubt and confidence to continue (see PI # 85) are criteria used to judge another to understand and to be a normal speaker of a language. Moreover, agreement in judgments, i.e. the comparison taking place in third person’s assertability conditions -on behalf of which the domain of a rule is or not attributed- are a “constitutive part” of the statements about intentional mental states and meaning intentions. That is to say, the answers for rules we are inclined to calculate (as ‘125’ for ‘57 + 68’) are criteria, although approximate and defeasible, for the (third person) attribution of rules. The basic or primitive character given to judgments of correction implies that the judgments on the instances of rules, the particular answers to problems of addition, for instance, are the constitutive part of the assertions about rules. As Kripke has pointed, the functioning of assertions on rules is clarified when considered along the lines of a contraposed conditional of the kind: “if A does not answer x (the value me myself am inclined to give) then she does not follow the rule” (see Kripke 1982, p. 90). There is no room here for an intermediary between instances and rule, which would break the internal relationship between them.

Consequently, the abandonment of truth conditions operating a deflation of the judgments of correctness, give us the frame for a satisfactory account of the internal relationships between the rule and its instances. Quite on the contrary, when we think of ‘correctness’ as a non basic term problems arise. The sceptical solution’s answer to these problems is mainly dissolution of them, in as much as it consists of leaving no room for the traditional problems to arise since it eliminates the assumptions on which these questions rest. As have been pointed by Martin Kusch, the change operated by the sceptical solution goes from “treating rules ascertain determinants of actions to studying the conditions under which rules are attributed” (Kusch 2006, p. 203).

To sum up, the examination of the different classical positions allows us to see that their difficulties were due to a philosophically overcharged of the duality of perspectives required to give an account of the functioning of language. This philosophically robust view considered in a way or another that this duality of perspectives was needed of support or foundation, and that philosophy or metaphysics was the place where to look for satisfaction of such need of foundations. The mentalist account of this duality that we found in the Privatist thesis was only a case of a more general problem, its understanding along the lines of truth conditions; mistake shared by several critics of private language purported mainly to be critics of mentalist of Cartesian truth conditions.


Villanueva, Ernesto (ed.), 1979, El argumento del lenguaje privado, México, UNAM.


