WHEREFORE THE FAILURE OF PRIVATE OSTENSION?

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§258 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is often seen as the core of his private language argument. While its role is certainly overinflated and it is a mistake to think that there is anything that could be called *the* private language argument, §258 is an important part of the private language sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*. As with so much of Wittgenstein's work, there are enormously diverse interpretations of why exactly the private diarist's attempted ostensive definition fails. I argue for a version of the no-stage-setting interpretation of the failure of private ostension. On this interpretation, the reason why the diarist cannot establish a meaning for 'S' is that she lacks the conceptual-linguistic stage-setting needed to disambiguate the concentration of her attention (the private analogue of an ostensive definition). Thus, the problem with any subsequent use of 'S' is not that there is no criterion of correctness for remembering the meaning of 'S' correctly, or for re-identifying S correctly in the future. Rather, it is because of the initial failure to define 'S' that there is nothing that could count as a criterion of correctness for the future use of 'S'; there is nothing to remember or re-identify. My argument for the no-stage-setting interpretation consists in showing how well it fits into the rest of the *Philosophical Investigations* and in defending it against objections from Robert J. Fogelin, Anthony Kenny, and most recently John V. Canfield. Kenny's and Canfield's objections are found to suffer from problems regarding memory scepticism.

1. Introduction

The private language sections (§§243-315)[1] of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) speak to many issues, among them privacy, identity, inner/outer relations, sensations as objects, and sensations as justification for sensation talk.[2] Central to the discussion is the nature of the meaning of our sensation words and expressions, and how they acquire meaning. Wittgenstein introduces the idea of a private language at §243 as a way to address these issues. Often §258 is seen as a key remark in what is often thought of as 'the private language argument'. However, in addition to the fact that Wittgenstein never uses 'private language argument', his methodological remarks,[3] the variety and complexity of issues discussed in §§243-315, and their very subtlety, suggest that there is not an argument that could be labelled *the* 'private language argument'. The remarks approach related issues from

[1] Except for those found in quotes from other authors, all quotations and citations of Wittgenstein's work are from the 2009 edition of *Philosophical Investigations* translated by Anscombe, Hacker, and Schulte. I am using this new translation in part because there are aspects of it that are much improved in comparison to earlier editions, despite the flaws I point out in this paper. Further, it deserves to be discussed in the current literature concerning the *Philosophical Investigations* due to those who were involved in the project of revising Anscombe's translation.

[2] For example: Privacy: §246, 293-295. Identity: §§253-254. Inner/outer relations: §§244, 257,258, 270, 281,282, 293. Sensations as objects: §§271, 274, 290, 293, 296-298, 304, 311. Sensations as justification for sensation talk: §§289-290, 296, 304. Please note, the references to particular remarks are not meant to be exhaustive, but merely examples of remarks dealing with that issue, among others.

[3] For example, §122 ff. Though see [von Savigny 1991] for a good discussion of the limitations on reading §§89-133 as the chapter 'On Philosophy' in PI.

different directions,[4] rather than forming a single critique of a single issue. This, however, does not negate the importance of §258, though it may make it less central in the overall discussion of privacy, sensations, their expression, and sensation language.

The central aim of this paper is to consider §258 in detail, and to offer and defend a 'no-stage-setting' interpretation of the failure of the diarist's purported private ostensive definition. My argument strategy is twofold: first, I show the continuity of §258 with other sections of PI, particularly §257 and those earlier sections that concern ostensive definitions and their viability absent a conceptual-linguistic stage-setting. Second, I defend a no-stage-setting interpretation by considering and rebutting outright denials of it by Anthony Kenny and John V. Canfield, and the denial of its sufficiency by Robert J. Fogelin.[5]

2. The Stage-Setting for §258

Following the motto and the preface, the first lines of PI are Augustine's: 'When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point *it* out' [Wittgenstein 2009: §1].[6] Without yet being able to speak, Augustine was able to see, e.g., that when adults pointed to a chair and said 'chair' they were naming the object, and the object was called 'chair'. This first section of PI brings in several of the issues, e.g., naming, meaning, and ostensive definition, that Wittgenstein focuses on throughout PI, though especially in the first 64 sections and in the discussion of a private language.[7] That one can understand an ostensive definition or give a name to something in the absence of a sufficient conceptual-linguistic stage-setting, whatever that might come to, and that names become meaningful simply by association with an object are some of the issues that come under severe criticism.[8]

One of the main lessons drawn from Wittgenstein's remarks on ostensive definitions is that outside of particular, disambiguating contexts, it is not clear from pointing, e.g., to a red ball while saying 'Red', that something is being named or that it is the colour and not the kind of object that is being named. Further, absent some

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[4] Cf.: 'The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made' [Wittgenstein 2009: 3].

[5] While it is best to be as charitable as possible in one's interpretation of what a philosopher writes, I do not reject Kenny's, Canfield's, and Fogelin's interpretations of Wittgenstein *merely* because they constitute objectionable versions of an argument against the possible success of a private ostensive definition. For, as an anonymous referee rightly points out, Wittgenstein may have simply given a bad argument. Rather, it is that their versions of Wittgenstein are objectionable together with my claim, which I attempt to justify in the course of this paper, that they fail to fully appreciate the continuity of §258 with earlier sections of PI. That continuity goes a long way toward indicating that their interpretations are mistaken and that a no-stage-setting interpretation is correct.

[6] See [Stern 2004: 56ff.] for a fruitful discussion of where PI begins.

[7] I say the first 64 because from 38 or so to 64, Wittgenstein is considering possibilities that would undermine what he has said (e.g., in §28) about the ambiguity of ostensive definitions. For example, if a name necessarily signified a simple, then there would be no ambiguity in 'pointing' to it.

[8] 'Ostensive definition' is not always the best translation of the German. Sometimes Wittgenstein wants to speak of definition and sometimes explanation. Anscombe's translation, while fine in many respects, fails to make this distinction. One of the most glaring cases of this is in PI: §6 where the German reads, 'Dies will ich nicht "hinweisende Erklärung", oder "Definition", nennen….' and the English translation reads simply 'I do not want to call this "ostensive definition"….' The 2009 edition remedies this problem.

kind of existing conceptual-linguistic framework, a gesture together with a spoken or written sign are not sufficient to either establish or demonstrate a connection between the sign and that to which one points.[9] Hence: '…one could say: the ostensive definition explains the use— the meaning—of a word if the role the word is supposed to play in the language is already clear' [Wittgenstein 2009: §30]. While acknowledging the dangers of generalising, we can say that to understand that something is being named, to name something, and to be able to ask a thing's name all require some degree of conceptual-linguistic ability. And therefore, ostensive definitions alone will not serve to ground the connection between sign and referent.[10]

3. The Remarks on Private Language: Emphasising Certain Continuities

As in the beginning sections, at §243 and following, names and ostensive definitions are once again a concern; however, now it is an examination of the naming of supposedly private sensations, private objects. In §244, one of PI's voices[11] asks how it is that words refer to sensations. We are told that this question is the same as: 'how does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations? For example, of the word "pain"'. A possibility is that a hurt child cries and the adults teach the child 'exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour' [2009: §244]. At §256, after various remarks concerning, *inter alia*, grammar and knowledge of pain, Wittgenstein comes back to the naming of purportedly private sensations. A language would not be private if name and sensation were connected in the ordinary sense, i.e., through the sensation's natural expression, as described in §244. Rather, with a 'private language' one is to associate a name with the sensation itself. At §257 we are reminded of the need for a grammatical, i.e., conceptual-linguistic stage-setting in order for naming to actually be effective.[12]

At §258, we are asked to imagine an instance of a 'simple' association of name and sensation: the keeping of a diary of a recurring sensation. 'To this end I

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[9] In this last example, however, there could occur the kind of ostensive teaching that Wittgenstein remarks on in [Wittgenstein 2009: §6].

[10] Or, more properly, the pointing and verbal aspects that would constitute an ostensive definition were they embedded in a 'language-game' are not by themselves sufficient to ground the connection between sign and referent.

[11] I am sympathetic to Stern's individuation of voices in PI. As opposed to the usual two voices, Stern argues that there is Wittgenstein's narrator, an interlocutory voice, and a third voice, a commentator, who:

> provides an ironic commentary on [the exchanges of the narrator and interlocutory voice], a commentary consisting partly of objections to assumptions the debaters take for granted, and partly of platitudes about language and everyday life they have both overlooked. [Stern: 2004: 22]

According to Stern, none of the voices can unproblematically be taken as Wittgenstein's own, though what he calls the narrator and the commentator voices are typically taken by other writers to express Wittgenstein's own views. By contrast, Stern understands the commentator to come closest to Wittgenstein's own views. I agree with Stern that the differentiation of these three voices allows for a better appreciation of the tension in PI involving Wittgenstein's desire to dissolve philosophical problems while constantly being tempted by philosophy to put forth still more philosophy.

[12] One thing lost with the new translation is the correspondence between the earlier English translation and certain well-known expressions used to talk about the text. Here is a good example: the interpretation of §258 I give is called the 'no-stage-setting interpretation' which takes its name from Anscombe's translation of §257, which reads, 'When one says "He gave a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense.' Nevertheless, transitioning to the new translation is worth such minor 'upsets'. I will continue to use the 'stage-setting' label to talk about the interpretation I offer.

associate it [the sensation] with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation'. From this we get the two main issues of §258: one, the initial naming of the sensation; and two, the subsequent meaningful use, the writing down, of the sign 'S' in the calendar whenever the sensation *reoccurs*. Different interpretations relate these two issues to one another in different ways in order to explain the failure of the ostensive definition in §258. Thus, one of the main question in interpreting §258 is how these two issues are connected.

In §258, after the would-be private diarist claims that he can give himself a kind of ostensive definition of 'S' by concentrating his attention on the sensation while writing the sign there comes the objection, 'But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to lay down the meaning of a sign, doesn't it?' The narrator denies that the association of sensation and sign in the context of the private diarist is successful in naming the sensation, i.e., establishing a meaning for the sign. This denial follows straightforwardly from the lack of a conceptual-linguistic stage-setting. The interlocutor, however, goes on to insist that he has defined the sign: 'Well, that is done precisely by concentrating my attention; for in this way I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation'.[13] At this point the second issue, the possibility of subsequent use, comes into play. The narrator responds:

> But "I commit it to memory" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection *correctly* in the future. But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'.

Why exactly there is no criterion of correctness is a key question. Answers vary, for example, from 1) there being problems with memory [Malcolm 1968 and 1995; Fogelin 1976; Mulhall 2007;[14] and ultimately Kenny 1986], to 2) the original association of sign and sensation failing, so that nothing was established that could be a criterion [Barry Stroud 2000; David G. Stern 2004; Fogelin 1976; Stewart Candlish and George Wrisley 2008; Mulhall 2007; Hans-Johann Glock 1996; and P.M.S. Hacker 1990], to 3) the special kind of criterion needed simply not being available in the context of the private diarist [Canfield 2001]. The requirement of a conceptual-linguistic stage-setting is often cited as a reason for 2). In the next section, I will briefly expand on the merits of the no-stage-setting interpretation. From there, I will examine Fogelin's claim that the no-stage-setting interpretation is not sufficient for

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[13] The original Anscombe translation translates the German 'sich einprägen' as 'to impress upon myself', where the new translation uses 'to commit to memory'. This change is unfortunate for a number of reasons. First, it erases the contrast in the original German between *impressing* something on myself *so that I remember* it correctly. And second, the imagery evoked by the idea of impressing something into something is lost. Mulhall, e.g., remarks how 'sich einprägen' evokes the idea of embossing a coin, [2007: 102]. And indeed, the loss of the contrast results in assuming that 'sich einprägen' can only have to do with memory, an assumption that is perhaps not warranted given the original German. It is true that Wittgenstein writes that 'Ich präge sie mir ein' *can only mean*: 'this process [of impressing it on myself] brings it about that I remember the connection *correctly* in the future'. But by translating 'sich einprägen' as 'to commit to memory' the claim of what 'sich einprägen' *can only mean* loses some of its force.

[14] Mulhall's position [in his 2007] is made problematic by his canvassing three readings of §258, none of which he definitively rejects, together with his claim that we can, with justification, read PI resolutely or substantively.

showing the *impossibility* of a private language.[15] And I will examine Kenny's and Canfield's denial that the stage-setting requirement is relevant to §258. I will attempt to show that their objections to the stage-setting requirement applying to §258 are unconvincing.

4. The No-Stage-Setting Interpretation

What is the problem with the diarist's naming his sensation and then subsequently using the name? The interlocutor's line, 'that [the establishing of the meaning of the sign] is done precisely by concentrating my attention; for in this way I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation' makes it sound as if all that is required in connecting the sign and sensation is the concentration of one's attention on the sensation while writing or saying 'S' to oneself. This should remind us of the discussion of naming, meaning, and ostensive definitions earlier in PI, especially §§23-38.

Given the points regarding naming and ostensive definition earlier in PI, and given the reminder at the end of §257 of the need for a grammatical stage-setting if naming is to make sense, the following no-stage-setting interpretation naturally suggests itself. The private diarist cannot use English, German, or any other existing public language, for then the diarist would not have a private language. And there is no pre-existing private language. The would-be diarist thus lacks a conceptual-linguistic stage-setting for whatever it is he is doing. Therefore, the concentration of attention on the sensation while writing or saying 'S' is merely ceremony.[16] Because the ostensive definition was a sham, 'S' has no meaning: no connection was established, and there is thus no question of remembering the connection correctly in the future. All the private diarist may have is the *impression* of having made a connection between sensation and sign; thus leaving him with nothing but seeming correctness when he goes to use 'S' again.

While I have tried to show that a no-stage-setting interpretation of §258 gives it an attractive continuity with the rest of PI, that interpretation is not without its detractors. And, indeed, because Wittgenstein does not explicitly invoke the stage-setting requirement in §258, two general ways to read the two issues found there—those being the initial baptism and the subsequent use of the sign—seem to be left open. On the first, either 'S' lacks any meaning beyond the initial baptism or the initial baptism is a failure since nothing can be done with 'S' subsequently. On these readings there is either a lack of independent verification of the correct application of 'S', or a lack of some form of criterion for having remembered the connection or the meaning correctly in the future. On the second way of reading §258, the ostensive definition failed because of the missing stage-setting: 'S' is never meaningful, so there is no criterion of correctness, and therefore there cannot be any correct application, and *a fortiori*, any reapplication of 'S'. In further support of the no-stage-setting interpretation, let us now turn to Fogelin's denial of its sufficiency, and Kenny's and Canfield's outright denials of its correctness.

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[15] One of the interesting things to come out of recent discussions of the private language sections is the emphasis on the question of whether 'A private language is possible' is best understood as false (in which case such a language is impossible) or nonsense (in which case there is nothing 'there' which is possible or not). See, e.g., [Mulhall 2007; Stern *forthcoming*].

[16] In fact, it is less than ceremony since from the private linguist's perspective there is nothing that can be called 'sensation' or 'concentration', etc. Cf. [Wittgenstein 2009: §261].

5. The Insufficiency of the No-Stage-Setting Interpretation: Fogelin

While endorsing it, Fogelin does not think that a no-stage-setting interpretation demonstrates the *impossibility* of a private language.[17] It merely shows the *difficulty* of constructing one. On his account it leaves open the possibility that the diarist establishes a use for the sign 'S' over time. Fogelin reads Wittgenstein as offering two arguments against such a possibility. The first he calls 'the training argument', and the second 'the public check argument' [Fogelin 1976: 175ff]. Since it is the public check argument that concerns §258 we will look at it. Fogelin interprets the last lines of §258 as saying that, in the end, the private diarist only has his memory of the past sensation available as a paradigm of the sensation; however, a memory alone does not provide for a means of differentiating between seeming to have the same sensation again and actually having it. Fogelin writes that if he is correct in this interpretation, Wittgenstein has 'simply gone wrong' [Fogelin 1976: 173]. This is because Wittgenstein would have used a general sceptical argument to achieve his point against the private diarist. However, since it is a general sceptical argument, Fogelin sees no reason that the private diarist cannot turn around and say the same thing to someone who is checking her memory against a public record. That is, e.g., a person checking the correctness of her memory of a train's timetable against the actual timetable does not have any way to differentiate its seeming that her memory matches the timetable and its actually matching: '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 timetable' [Fogelin 1976: 180]. Fogelin makes it clear that he is not advancing these sceptical doubts, but only questions why they should apply to the private diarist and not to everyone, since they are general. Fogelin's point is well-taken regarding the sceptical doubts about memory, making it problematic for one who holds that memory is at issue in §258. However, the question remains as to whether he is correct in attributing these doubts to Wittgenstein in §258.

It is unclear why Fogelin would give a no stage-setting interpretation of §258 and then go on to raise the possibility that a use for 'S' might be established such that Wittgenstein needs to raise sceptical doubts about memory. If the 'S' was not given meaning by the initial attempted ostensive definition, then how could there be any question about the later establishment of a use for 'S'? In the context of the private diarist, any attempt to establish a use for 'S' must involve repeated association of 'S' with the 'same' sensation on subsequent occasions. If each particular association without a stage-setting fails, there is no reason to think that a series of failed associations will amount to the establishment of a use for 'S'. So, since the no stage-setting interpretation does away with the need for an appeal to problematic memory scepticism, it seems misguided to attribute such an appeal to Wittgenstein or whomever we take to be speaking in the dialogue of §258.

[17] By criticising Fogelin's claim that the no-stage-setting interpretation is insufficient to undermine the possibility of a private language, I am not thereby claiming that §258 *does* show the impossibility of a private language. My main contention is that the notion of a private ostensive definition is a non-starter because of the lack of a stage-setting. I am not addressing whether this cuts off all possible means to there being a private language. Further, I am not addressing the controversy mentioned in footnote 15 concerning whether the notion of a private language is empty instead of impossible.

6. Denials of the No-Stage-Setting Interpretation: Kenny

Unlike the interpretations given by Stroud et al., Anthony Kenny separates §257 from §258. He argues that §§243-255 show that our word 'pain' is not a word of a private language and that from §258 onward the topic is pseudo-pain instead of pain: 'a sensation supposed to be like pain but different from pain in being incommunicable' [Kenny 1986: 220]. However, even if Kenny did not separate §257 and §258 in this way, he would not take the stage-setting considerations to be relevant for §258. Kenny claims that the stage-setting requirement is not the whole story concerning private language. If it were, the possibility of a private language would be removed before the idea of a private language is even mentioned, since it is discussed early in PI. [18]

More importantly, the stage-setting requirement leaves open the possibility of a private language being learnt from private sensations by 'some private analog of training in the use of words' instead of through 'bare ostension' [Kenny 1986: 211].[19] According to Kenny, the private language discussion is supposed to show that no such training is possible which could serve as the required background for a private ostensive definition. This blocks the possibility of learning a private language through a private analogue of training oneself what words mean. Thus for Kenny, it is not the stage-setting requirement mentioned at the end of §257 that causes the private ostensive definition to fail in §258. The private ostensive definition fails because of problems with 'remembering which sensation the sign means' [Kenny 1986: 223].

According to Kenny, many are unsympathetic to the memory scepticism some interpreters find in §258. The critics want to know why it should be problematic for the private diarist and not for a public speaker. Wittgenstein's defenders, according to Kenny, have tried to argue that the public speaker can be corrected by others whereas the private diarist cannot.[20] However, Kenny argues that both critic and defender base their arguments on a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's argument. In §258, Wittgenstein is not arguing, '"When next I call something 'S' how will I know it is really S?" He is arguing "When next I call something 'S' how will I know what I mean by 'S'"?' [Kenny 1986: 221]. Kenny wants to offer a *semantic* rather than an *epistemic* reading. Accordingly, Wittgenstein is not advocating the need for a way to verify whether a current sensation is really 'S', for this would be an unreasonably strong requirement of the infallibility of re-identification. Public speakers are not held to such a strict requirement; so why should the private linguist? Requiring only the ability to remember what the sign means, on the other hand, does not require infallibility: 'attaching meaning to a name does not mean acquiring infallibility in its

[18] While Kenny is surely right that the stage-setting considerations are not the whole story regarding private language, he is surely wrong to think that those considerations being raised earlier in PI would negate the need to apply them to sensation language. A part of Wittgenstein's genius is getting us to look at things we might otherwise never have thought to consider, or to consider things in many different ways that we previously considered in only one way.

[19] This sounds similar to the possibility that Fogelin saw left open by the stage-setting requirement, i.e., that the diarist establishes a use for 'S'.

[20] Malcolm would seem to be such a defender. According to Malcolm, a memory impression must be either accurate or inaccurate, and the private diarist has no way to establish the accuracy of his 'memory' of the association of sensation and sign in regard to future instances of the sensation [Malcolm 1968: 70]. The diarist has no basis for distinguishing between remembering the connection correctly and seeming to remember it correctly [Malcolm 1995: 137]. Further, an essential feature of language is the possibility of being corrected by others [Malcolm 1995: 138].

use – knowing what 'woman' means does not guarantee that one will never mistake a woman for a man' [Kenny 1986: 223].

According to Kenny, the private diarist has only three possible ways of knowing what 'S' means at later instances after the initial ostensive definition. The diarist may a) once again associate 'S' with a current sensation, b) appeal to a memory of 'S', or c) rely on a correlate of the referent of 'S'. Kenny argues that Wittgenstein shows that all three possibilities fail and with them goes the possibility of setting up a practice. With a) the problem is that it essentially involves a redefining of the sign each time, in which case the association which is supposed to give 'S' content also gives it its truth—so whatever seems correct is correct.

With b) the diarist must call to mind the correct memory of what was meant by 'S'. However, if it is not possible for him to remember wrongly, then 'S' means whatever comes to mind as connected to 'S', thereby making whatever seems correct be correct. In turn, if it is possible to remember wrongly, then the diarist is actually unsure of what he means by 'S', since he is left only to believe that the current sensation is what 'S' meant earlier.

Kenny takes c) from PI §270: with the use of a correlate such as a manometer showing a rise in blood-pressure whenever the diarist has a particular sensation, misidentification is irrelevant as long as the diarist consistently misidentifies the kind of sensation or misremembers what kind of sensation indicates a rise in blood-pressure. In such a case, it's irrelevant whether the diarist makes an actual mistake [Kenny 1986: 224].

Now because a), b), and c) are supposed to be the only possibilities where the diarist can be said to correctly remember what 'S' means, and since they all fail, according to Kenny, 'S' cannot be meaningfully used in the future and thus lacks meaning altogether. Kenny surely doesn't want to say that the diarist forgets what the sign means, but rather that there is nothing that can count as remembering what it means. It is in this way that Kenny believes Wittgenstein argues that the private ostensive definition cannot be used to confer meaning on the sign and to establish a subsequent practice. Kenny's interpretation of §258 is not supposed to suffer from problems of verificationism or memory scepticism. However, it is not clear that Kenny has really offered an interpretation that removes insuperable problems concerning memory.

Kenny may have shown that possibilities a) and c), from above, legitimately fail. This is not necessarily the case with b), where the diarist must call to mind the correct memory of what was meant by 'S'. Recall that Kenny writes regarding b) that for the diarist, if 1) it is not possible for him to remember wrongly, then 'S' means whatever comes to mind as connected to 'S', thereby making whatever seems correct be correct. Alternatively, if 2) it is possible to remember wrongly, then the diarist is actually unsure of what he means by 'S', since he is left only to believe that the current sensation is what 'S' meant earlier. Let us look at why 1) and 2) are problematic.

Regarding 1), what could it mean for the diarist not to be able to remember wrongly? Does it mean i) there is no way for him to find out whether he remembers wrongly *or* ii) that he always remembers correctly? Kenny's response to 1) seems to imply i), which would mean that the issue is that the diarist has no way to check whether the memory he has called to mind is the correct one. However, if it were ii), there still would be the issue of whether he could check whether he had called to mind the correct memory, for he cannot know in advance that he will always call to mind the correct memory. With public things like time-tables one can check whether one

remembered correctly by looking at the original time-table. This is something the private diarist cannot do even if he did happen always to remember correctly. So, whether 'it is not possible for him to remember wrongly' is understood as i) or ii), the issue arises of being able to check for the correctness of the memory called to mind. However, if that is correct, then 1) then falls prey to Fogelin's criticism. The private diarist can ask how a person who looks at a public timetable knows that it is not just that it seems that the timetable either confirms or contradicts his memory. So, if being able to tell whether a memory is, and not just seems, correct is a problem for the private diarist, it also is for the public speaker using a timetable.

Regarding 2), 'it is possible for the diarist to remember wrongly', it also falls prey to the same criticism. The possibility of remembering wrongly is only an issue when the diarist cannot tell whether he has remembered wrongly or not. So, with 2) the question of being able to check a memory is again at issue. Thus, Kenny argues that the diarist could not remember the meaning of 'S' because none of the possibilities a), b), or c) are sufficient for remembering the meaning of 'S'. However, it turns out that his rejection of b) actually incorporates a general scepticism about memory. Therefore, if Fogelin is right that appeals to memory scepticism make for a bad argument, then Kenny's interpretation of §258 does not show that the diarist's private ostensive definition fails.[21]

Kenny's more general criticism of the no-stage-setting interpretation is that it leaves open the possibility of a private language being learnt by 'some private analog of training in the use of words' instead of through 'bare ostension' [Kenny 1986: 211]. However, he does not make clear what this 'private analog of training' might be. Further, the notion of private training is problematic because it fails to conform to two key aspects of training. First, when Wittgenstein speaks of training, the context is one where there is already a practice where the words have meaning. Secondly, the one doing the training knows the words where the one being trained does not.[22]

We have now seen that Kenny's alternative to the no-stage-setting interpretation is susceptible to Fogelin's criticism regarding scepticism about memory. Further, Kenny's claim that the no-stage-setting interpretation leaves open the possibility of a private analogue of training is unconvincing, particularly in light of the criticisms given above at the end of section five to Fogelin's similar claims.

7. Denials of the No-Stage-Setting Interpretation: Canfield

Canfield argues that the stage-setting requirements cannot be at issue in §258 because it would make the argument there circular. It is not that there is no criterion of correctness because the private ostensive definition fails, but rather that the ostensive definition fails because there is no criterion of correctness [Canfield 2001: 379 and 390-91]. Let us look at why he thinks this and why his interpretation is unconvincing.

Canfield admits that it is clear that Wittgenstein rejects the notion of a private ostensive definition because of stage-setting requirements; however, Canfield argues that the stage-setting requirement cannot be said to be the reason he rejects private ostensive definition in §258. On Canfield's account, the last four lines of §258 are supposed to demonstrate why the private ostensive definition fails in the earlier part of §258. Key to the demonstration of that failure is the diarist's having no criterion of

[21] In a discussion of the same Kenny text, Candlish makes similar criticisms. See [Candlish 1998: 154-55].
[22] See, e.g., [Wittgenstein 2009:§§5, 6, and 9].

correctness. Hence, if we say that the reason there is no criterion is because the attempted private ostensive definition fails, we have a circular argument. From this, Canfield concludes that Wittgenstein is making some further point against the possibility of private ostensive definition aside from the lack of a stage-setting [Canfield 2001: 382-83].

On the no-stage-setting interpretation, the last four lines of §258 spell out the consequences of the failed attempt at definition; they don't give the reason for the failure. The supposed circularity that Canfield finds when attributing the stage-setting requirement to §258 stems from his assumption that the private ostensive definition fails because there is no criterion. Unfortunately, instead of arguing that the last four lines of §258 should be interpreted as giving the reason for the failure of the private ostensive definition, Canfield simply asserts that they do. He then goes on to state that this makes the no-stage-setting interpretation of §258 circular; whereupon he goes on to give his own interpretation of the last four lines of §258. Thus, the initial charge of circularity lacks any real force. However, there still remains the question of the soundness of Canfield's interpretation. If his interpretation is sound, it may constitute a good reason to think he is correct to claim that the last four lines of §258 give the reason for the failure of the private ostensive definition.

According to Canfield, in §258 Wittgenstein 'assumes that the meaning of the diarist's subsequent judgment "S" is a function of the rule of sign-referent association governing it' [Canfield 2001: 383]. That is, 'S' has meaning on later occasions of its use insofar as there is a rule that governs the association of 'S' with the sensation to which it is to refer. To clarify this, Canfield makes the distinction between a factual mistake and a rule-related mistake. An example of a factual mistake would be when someone is given the ostensive definition of 'pen' and later mistakenly identifies a pencil as a pen because that pencil looks like a pen. An example of rule-related mistake would be when the recipient of the ostensive definition misremembers what was defined as 'pen', thereby calling a crayon a 'pen'. According to Canfield, Wittgenstein is concerned with a rule-related mistake in §258. The point of §258 then becomes that the diarist cannot be said to successfully impress the connection between sign and referent on himself if he cannot go on later to remember that connection correctly and thereby make judgements in virtue of that remembered connection. It is a necessary condition for the success of an ostensive definition that the recipient, even when it is oneself, remembers the connection correctly in the future. Wittgenstein is supposed to be using §258 to state this necessary condition [Canfield 2001: 383].[23]

Canfield distinguishes between strong and weak interpretations of the diarist's remembering correctly the connection between sign and sensation. On the strong interpretation the diarist must know or in some way prove that she remembers the connection correctly, but she cannot. On the weak interpretation the diarist must simply remember correctly, but she cannot. Canfield writes that the weak interpretation may seem 'lame', since the diarist might be lucky enough to just happen to remember correctly. But the knowledge requirement in the strong version makes the diarist's case easier to undermine, since it requires the diarist to know the correctness of what he judges; and that seems to be, at the very least, very difficult for him to do. However, Canfield thinks that the strong version leaves open the possibility of the private linguist using the weak version as an 'escape hatch'.

[23] It would not be sufficient, Canfield tells us, because the diarist might still make some mistake in carrying out the keeping of the diary.

Importantly, if the weak version is rebutted, then so is the strong version: 'if remembering right is senseless here so is knowing, justifying, or determining that one has remembered right' [Canfield 2001: 387]. Canfield holds that the weak interpretation is correct. The criterion of correctness is supposed to govern whether the diarist remembered correctly not whether he *knows* he remembered correctly.

It is understandable that Canfield doesn't want to endorse what he calls the strong interpretation of remembering the connection correctly. One problem, as we saw with Kenny's account, is that the strong interpretation brings to issue how it is that public users of language know that they remember things correctly. Canfield is aware of this and he labels Kenny's interpretation a version of the strong interpretation [2001: 387-88].

Importantly, Canfield seeks to show that it does not make sense for the private linguist to remember the connection. That is, he wants the focus of the attack in §258 to be on the fact that remembering in the private diarist's case *does not make sense*, not that the diarist could but fails to remember correctly or that he may actually remember correctly and just not be able to prove it. The problem is thus not supposed to be epistemological, but rather logical or grammatical [Canfield 2001: 388].

Central to showing that the very notion of remembering does not make sense for the diarist, Canfield appeals to what he admits is a controversial principle he thinks is available in PI: 'Present tense criteria govern the truth of past tense propositions' [Canfield 2001: 388].[24] Canfield's formulation of this principle is open to various readings. To clarify, present tense criteria are criteria that concern what is the case concurrently with, or subsequently to, the time of judgement: 'For example, such a criterion governs my report at noon about what I had for breakfast. If I am sincere, and if my claim is borne out by physical and testimonial evidence, then the claim is true' [Canfield 2001: 388]. From Canfield's formulation of the example, we learn something very important about the way the present tense criteria 'govern' the truth of past tense propositions: if the criteria are satisfied, they provide a sufficient condition for the truth of the claim.[25]

That they provide a sufficient condition is important to emphasise, since it is a part of what undermines Canfield's reading, as I will argue. We should note that Canfield makes clear that the present tense criteria are epistemological and not metaphysical. He writes, 'to say there is a present tense criterion governing a certain claim does not mean that we will ever be able to establish its truth or falsity' [2001: 388]. Clearly, then, he is not claiming that whether a past tense proposition is true, whether what it says actually occurred, depends on our being able to verify it via present tense criteria. Canfield writes that 'very different sorts of criteria operate in the case of *establishing*' the truth of various sorts of claims made about the past [2001: 388. My emphasis.]. So it is clear that what the present tense criteria govern is not whether a past tense proposition is true, but the way in which we come to *know* that it is true. Having made this clear, let us look at the rest of Canfield's argument for the failure of the private ostensive definition in §258 before turning to why that argument fails.

As we saw, for Canfield the most plausible account of §258 is a version of the weak interpretation, on which 'we require simply that he remember the connection

[24] This is a quote from Canfield, not from PI. And he explains in a footnote that it is controversial because of, among other things, its association with Michael Dummett and issues concerning realism/antirealism [2001: 388, footnote 20].

[25] Canfield claims in an earlier footnote that the distinction between assertibility and truth conditions regarding criteria is 'spurious' [2001: 385, footnote 14].

right', which requires a present tense criterion of correctness [Canfield 2001: 387]. Why exactly is such a criterion not available? Well, the diarist cannot use any publicly available criteria for obvious reasons, nor, Canfield says, can he appeal to a practice or standard sample. Thus, all the diarist has to appeal to are the *present* 'contents of his mind', but there is nothing 'in his mind' that possibly qualifies as a criterion. All the diarist could possibly have is the feeling of remembering the connection correctly; hence, he has no objective criterion, thus leading Wittgenstein to say whatever seems correct is correct, which means there is no correct [Canfield 2001: 390].

An important question regarding Canfield's interpretation is whether we should attribute the present tense criteria principle to PI, particularly since it is not found there explicitly. But let us assume that Canfield is right not only about the soundness of the present tense criteria principle, but also that it applies to the private diary case. Here is why Canfield's interpretation is flawed: Let us call the private diarist 'P'. If we claim that it makes no sense to say that P remembers correctly the connection between 'S' and S *unless P has a present tense criterion of correctness that P can know*[26] *is satisfied or not*, then we are claiming that P cannot be said to remember correctly the connection between 'S' and S *unless he knows the connection between 'S' and S*. This is because the satisfaction of present tense criteria entails knowledge of the truth of that which the criteria are for. If the private diarist cannot be said to remember correctly the connection between 'S' and S unless he has a present tense criterion of correctness, and the satisfaction of that criterion would *establish* the truth of the connection between 'S' and S, then the private diarist cannot be said to remember the connection correctly unless he knows the connection between 'S' and S. In other words, only if the diarist can know that he remembers correctly, can he be said to remember correctly the connection between 'S' and S. Let us call this latter claim 'SI'. I will defend SI below. For now note that SI is importantly different from the claim, call it 'WI', that P cannot be said to remember correctly the connection between 'S' and S unless P has the memory '"S" is connected to S' and he indeed connected 'S' to S. SI is equivalent to what Canfield calls the strong interpretation of §258, and WI to the weak interpretation. Therefore, in claiming that the diarist needs a present tense criterion of correctness, Canfield is endorsing a strong interpretation, the very interpretation he denied giving and which thinks is incorrect.

I will now defend SI, the claim that only if the diarist can know that he remembers correctly, can he be said to remember correctly the connection between 'S' and S. SI depends on the following equivalence holding:

> E) One has knowledge of present tense criteria and knowledge of their satisfaction, if, and only if, one knows the truth concerning that which the present tense criteria are for.

Let us take E) apart:

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[26] One might question the use of 'know' here in regard to saying that one knows that certain criteria are satisfied in contrast to simply believing that they are satisfied. However, if X is a criterion for establishing the truth of Y, and if X's being met is a sufficient condition for Y's being true, then if we know that X is met, then we know Y. If we require a further criterion, say X^1, to determine whether or not X has really been met, then we will presumably need a still further criterion, X^2, to determine if X^1 has been met. And it seems we are off on an infinite regress that undermines the whole point of appealing to criteria. This is one of the problems with appealing to criteria as a means of establishing the truth of something.

A) If one has knowledge of present tense criteria and knowledge of their satisfaction, one knows the truth concerning that which the present tense criteria are for.

B) If one knows the truth concerning that which the present tense criteria are for, then one has knowledge of present tense criteria and knowledge of their satisfaction.

On Canfield's position, A) holds, since having present tense criteria about past events and ascertaining that they are met is sufficient for establishing the truth of claims about those past events. But does B) hold? B) states that having knowledge of present tense criteria and knowledge of their satisfaction are necessary conditions for knowing the truth concerning that which the criteria are for. They would only be necessary conditions if there were no other way to establish the truth concerning that which the criteria are for. Is there any other way to establish the truth of some past event X aside from appealing to present tense criteria on Canfield's position? Since X is in the past, it cannot be present to consciousness. What if X had been present to consciousness for person P? Could P establish the truth of X by appealing to P's memory of that past experience? Well, according to Canfield, whether P remembers X correctly will depend on whether P has a present tense criterion of correctness, which will be a present tense criterion of correctness for X. So remembering is out.[27] Thus, on Canfield's position, present tense criteria seem to be the only way to establish the truth of past events. Therefore, B) holds. Since A) and B) hold, then so does the equivalence E).

My objection to Canfield's interpretation of §258 is that if E) holds, then claiming, as he does, that no sense can be made of the diarist's remembering correctly the connection between 'S' and S unless he has a present tense criterion of correctness is equivalent to saying that no sense can be made of the diarist's remembering correctly the connection between 'S' and S unless he *knows* that he remembers that connection correctly. We've seen above that given Canfield's view, E) indeed holds. Therefore, Canfield's interpretation amounts to the strong interpretation.

However, one might raise the following objection: the left-hand side of the equivalence, E), has two parts that have to be met, namely, knowledge of present tense criteria *and* knowledge of their satisfaction. Canfield has said that we may know the criteria for a statement, but even so 'to say there is a present tense criterion governing a certain claim does not mean that we will ever be able to establish its truth or falsity' [Canfield 2001: 388]. This is because we may not be able to know whether the present tense criteria are satisfied. For example, say we have taught P the rule for the use of 'This is red'. According to Canfield, P remembers that rule correctly if he cites the correct rule or if his use of 'red' conforms to the community's use of 'red'. But say we teach P 'This is red', but then before we can see if either of those criteria is satisfied, P suddenly dies. Therefore, analogously to the public case, saying that the diarist must have a present tense criterion of correctness, is not the same as saying *he must know that it is satisfied*.

In response we should note that while having a criterion and having something that would satisfy the criterion are two different things, to require the criterion is to

[27] One possibility for establishing the truth of X that does not require appealing to present tense criteria would be travelling back in time and seeing X for oneself. However, given the fact that time travel (as far as we know) is not real, and given that it may not be logically possible (given certain time travel paradoxes), time travel is not a viable alternative to present tense criteria.

require the *possibility* of its being satisfied. It is not to require that it actually is sometimes, often, or always satisfied. In the public example with 'This is red', if we required a criterion for whether P correctly remembered the rule for 'This is red', but there was no *possibility* of that criterion being satisfied, then it would be empty to say that there must be *that* criterion for correctly remembering the rule. We can imagine a case in which by chance a criterion is never satisfied; but in such a case it was at least possible. Thus, the work that E) does in showing Canfield's interpretation is actually a version of the strong one does not depend on Canfield's requiring the diarist to have a present tense criterion and having it actually satisfied in any particular case. Rather, it depends on his requiring a present tense criterion that is in principle satisfiable. And the point, then, is that its satisfaction equates to knowledge. Therefore, because of E), requiring the diarist to have a present tense criterion is equivalent to requiring the diarist to know that he has remembered the connection between 'S' and S correctly. This is the strong interpretation that Canfield rightly rejects because of its untenable implications of a general scepticism about memory. And therefore, we are right to reject Canfield's interpretation of §258.

Canfield wants Wittgenstein to say something new and important in §258 and he thinks that if the stage-setting requirement were used there, nothing new and interesting would be said. However, even if the stage-setting requirement is not new by the time one gets to §257, Wittgenstein's explicit application of it to our 'inner' life is new.

8. Concluding Remarks

Applying the stage-setting requirement to the private diarist's case in §258 allows for a straightforward and plausible reading of the failure of the private ostensive definition. It is a reading that coheres well with other things that Wittgenstein writes—particularly in the beginning parts of PI—and which does not suffer the ills of the kind of interpretations given by Fogelin, Kenny, and Canfield. All three authors end up with interpretations that face insuperable, and unnecessary, problems concerning scepticism about memory.[28]

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