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WITTGENSTEIN'S CONCEPTION OF FIRST PERSON
PSYCHOLOGICAL SENTENCES AS "EXPRESSIONS"

by

NORMAN MALCOLM

1. The conception I want to talk about was an important development in Wittgenstein's later philosophical thought, and was also a radical break with the thinking of the Tractatus. The question at issue is roughly this: What kind of meaning, or what kind of function, belongs to first person, present tense, psychological sentences? According to Wittgenstein's new conception, when a person says "My head aches," this is an "expression" of pain in a sense of the word "expression" analogous to the sense in which a facial grimace or a groan can be an expression of pain. The remark "I expect him any moment now," is an expression of expectation, analogous to the way in which frequently looking out of the window, or hastily tidying up the room, could be expressions of expectation.

So far, this does not make the new conception very clear. It may help to compare it with the viewpoint of the Tractatus. In that work Wittgenstein held that every meaningful sentence or proposition, presents or pictures or depicts, an actual or possible situation in the world. "A proposition is a picture of reality" (4.01). "A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false" (2.21). "It is laid against reality like a ruler" (2.1512). "Reality is compared with the proposition" (4.05).

Now if there are meaningful sentences the primary function of which in language is to be expressive, in the sense in which wincing can be expressive of physical pain, or tidying up your room can be an expression of expectation, it would not be appropriate to speak of comparing reality with such sentences, nor of holding them against reality like a measuring stick nor of checking them against the facts--anymore than you would speak of checking your own winces or grimaces against the facts.

2. Although the Tractatus holds that every meaningful indicative sentence is a depiction of some possible fact, it does not say that understanding a sentence consists in knowing how to compare it with the facts—in knowing how to test it or verify it. The Tractatus does say that "To understand a sentence means to know what is the case, if it is true" (4.024). But there is added this remark: "One understands it if one understands its constituents." This means that if you understand all the words of a sentence, you understand the sentence. Knowing how to verify what the sentence depicts to be the case, is not added on as a further requirement.

For some years I was puzzled about the origins of the Verification Principle ("The meaning of a proposition is its method of verification.") Many had assumed that this Principle had originated with the Tractatus; for it was known that the latter had influenced the so-called Vienna Circle in which the Verification Principle played the role of a primary dogma. But this Principle is not explicitly stated in the Tractatus, and in fact a contrary view seems to be implied. It was not until I read Wittgenstein's Philosophische Bemerkungen, and also Waismann's notes of conversations with Wittgenstein, that I learned the answer. The Philosophisches Bemer-
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kungen,\(^1\) a complete work written by Wittgenstein in 1929—30, contains many
formulations of the Verification Principle, or of something like it. I will quote
some of them: “The sense of a question is the method of answering it” (p.66).
“Tell me how you are searching and I will tell you what you are searching for”
(p. 67). “A question always corresponds to a method of finding out” (p. 77).
“To understand the sense of a sentence, means to know how to decide whether it
is true or false” (ibid.). “It is not possible to believe something one cannot
conceive of as verified in some way” (p. 89). Two hypotheses “must be identi-
cal in the sense if every possible experience that confirms the one also confirms the
other” (pp. 94—95). “An error which in principle cannot be discovered is no error”
(p. 104). The meaning of a mathematical equation “must issue from its proof. The
meaning of the sentence is what the proof proves (not more and not less)” (p. 144).
“Each sentence is the guide to a verification” (p. 174). “How a sentence comes to
be verified is what it says” (p. 200). “The verification is not a sign of its truth but
is the sense of the sentence” (ibid.).

Thus when Wittgenstein returned to intensive philosophical work in 1929,
his first thinking emphasized a strong connection between the concepts of sense
and of verification, an emphasis that was absent from the Tractatus. This new con-
ception was transmitted to some members of the Vienna Circle in discussion. The
book entitled Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis\(^2\) is largely composed of
notes taken by Frederich Waismann, that record numerous conversations between
Wittgenstein, on the one hand, and on the other, principally Waismann and Moritz
Schlick, although Rudolf Carnap and Herbert Feigl were often present. This record
of discussions covers the period from December 1929 to December 1931. Apparen-
ly Wittgenstein did most of the talking in those meetings and plainly was the domi-
nant figure. Here again there appears Wittgenstein’s insistence on a conceptual tie
between sense and verification. For example, Waismann attributes to Wittgenstein
the remark that “The sense of a sentence is the method of its verification” (WK, p.
79); and also this: “In order to fix the sense of a sentence, I must know a definite
procedure whereby the sentence shall be accepted as verified” (WK, p. 47); “If I
can never completely verify the sense of a sentence, then I cannot have meant any-
thing by the sentence” (ibid.).

3. It seems to me scarcely doubtful that those discussions were influential in
making the Verification Principle emerge as a central doctrine of the Vienna Circle.
The Verification Principle contributed, of course, to the behaviorism or physicalism
of the Vienna Circle. Those sentences by which a person predicates of himself
sensations, feelings, thoughts, intentions, moods, obviously present a problem for
the Verification Principle. Those first person sentences could hardly be dismissed
as meaningless. But if they were meaningful they had to be capable of verification.
Behaviorism rejected the idea that one could verify one’s own first person sentences
by comparing them with one’s own inner experiences or mental states. The only
alternative in sight was to hold that each person can verify his own first person
psychological sentences, by comparing them with his (her) own behavior and/or physical states.

It is interesting, however, that there is already in Wittgenstein's Philosophische Bemerkungen (which, as we noted, is vigorously verificationist) a remark that hints at a criticism of behaviorism: "If I say that I believe that some-one is sad, I see his behavior as it were through the medium of sadness, under the aspect of sadness." But could one say: "It seems to me that I am sad, for I am letting my head hang so." (PB, pp. 89-90). This comical question suggests that there is something wrong with the notion that I might look at my own posture or behavior to find out whether I am sad. But the question also poses a problem: If I do not verify that I am sad by noting my behavior, then how do I verify it? Although Wittgenstein seems to have been criticizing behaviorism in the just quoted remark, he was not relaxing his insistence on a necessary connection between sense and verification. For two pages later he says:

"I am not in pain" means: If I compare the proposition "I am in pain" with reality, this shows that it is false. -I must be able to compare it with what is actually the case. And this possibility of comparison... is what we mean by the expression... (PB, p. 92).

To speak of the possibility of comparing a proposition with reality, is equivalent to speaking of the possibility of verifying it. But the just quoted remark poses two problems: First, how does one compare the sentence "I'm in pain" with reality? What is the procedure? Second, if one does compare it with reality, then it would seem that one could make a mistake, just as one can make a mistake in taking a measurement. It would follow that one could think oneself to be in pain when one wasn't, or that oneself could be in pain but not know it. Both consequences seem absurd.

4. After his sudden return to philosophy in 1929, Wittgenstein began to lecture in Cambridge, and to discuss, think, and write, with the remarkable intensity that was always characteristic of him. In the early 1930's his philosophical ideas were changing rapidly. C.E. Moore's account of the lectures of Wittgenstein that Moore attended from 1930 to 1933, illustrates the wide range of the lecture topics and also the swiftness of movement and change in Wittgenstein's thinking. This is particularly evident in a passage I will quote from Moore, a passage dealing with a sequence of Wittgenstein's discussions on the topic of our present concern. The following is Moore's report:

He began the discussion by raising a question, which he said was connected with Behaviorism, namely, the question "When we say "He has a toothache" is it correct to say that his toothache is only his behavior, whereas when I talk about my toothache I am not talking about my behavior?"; but very soon he introduced a question expressed in different words, which is perhaps not merely a different formulation of the same question, viz. "Is another person's toothache a "toothache" in the same sense as mine?" In trying to find an answer to this question or these questions, he said first that it was clear and admitted that what verifies or is a criterion for 'I have a toothache' is quite different from what verifies
or is a criterion for 'He has a toothache,' and soon added that, since this is so, the meanings of 'I have a toothache' and 'He has a toothache' must be different. In this connection he said later, first, that the meaning of verification is different, when we speak of verifying 'I have' from what it is when we speak of verifying 'He has,' and then, later still, that there is no such thing as a verification for 'I have,' since the question 'How do you know that you have a toothache?' is nonsensical. He criticized two answers which might be given to this last question by people who think it is not nonsensical, by saying (1) that the answer 'Because I feel it' won't do, because 'I feel it' means the same as 'I have it,' and (2) that the answer 'I know it by inspection' also won't do, because it implies that I can 'look to see' whether I have it or not, whereas 'looking to see whether I have it or not' has no meaning.

Moore's description illustrates not only the rapid evolution of Wittgenstein's thinking about the psychological sentences, but also the tenacity with which he pursued any philosophical problem. It is of interest that Wittgenstein wrote in a notebook the following observation about himself: "My talent for philosophy consists in continuing to be puzzled when others have let the puzzlement slip away."

Moore's account proves that by 1932 or 1933 there had emerged from Wittgenstein's thinking the "discovery" that the concept of verification has no application to some first person psychological sentences: one cannot "verify" that oneself feels hot, or hungry, or wants to sit down. It is ironic that some members of the Vienna Circle went on insisting that a sentence is meaningless if there is no possibility of verifying it, long after the originator of the Verification Principle had abandoned it.

Wittgenstein's new realization about first person sentences must have been terribly difficult to achieve. For it is compelling to reason as follows: "The sentence 'I am in pain' obviously has sense; so it depicts a possible state of affairs; so it is either true or false; so it must be possible, logically speaking, to determine which it is; so it must be possible to compare the sentence with reality."

It took a powerful and determined mind to break through that net of reasoning. This breakthrough had momentous consequences in the subsequent development of Wittgenstein's thought.

5. Wittgenstein began to use the word "Ausserungen" to characterize psychological sentences in the first person present tense. This word is not easily translated. The noun Ausserung is related to the preposition ausser, which can mean out: e.g. ausser dem House essen (to dine out). Ausserung is also related to the adjective aussere (exterior, outer, outside): to the verb aussern (to utter, to express, to give utterance): and to the reflexive verb sich aussern (to express oneself). The noun Ausserung itself has a variety of meanings: e.g. announcement, pronouncement, utterance, expression, assertion, statement, observation, remark. Translators and critics of Wittgenstein have proposed several different English words for Ausserung, e.g. expression, manifestation, utterance, avowal. I myself favor the word "expression" for the reason that Wittgenstein was presenting an analogy between first per-
son psychological sentences and the nonlinguistic behavior that we normally characterize as expressive of pain, fear, grief, hope, expectation, or whatever.

Wittgenstein gave different formulations of the relation of the first person sentences to nonlinguistic expressions of sensation and feeling. In some notes for lectures, composed in English approximately between 1934 and 1936, he wrote: “We teach the child to use the words ‘I have a toothache’ to replace its moans” (NFL, p. 295; my emphasis). A few pages later he writes: “Roughly speaking: The expression ‘I have a toothache’ stands for a moan but it does not mean ‘I moan.’” (NFL, p. 301; my emphasis). But in the actual lectures Wittgenstein said that it “is a substitute for moaning” and “replaces moaning,” instead of “stands for” a moan (NFL, fn. p. 301). In The Blue Book5 (lectures dictated to students in 1933-34), he says: “The difference between the propositions ‘I have pain’ and ‘He has pain’ is not that of ‘L.W. has pain’ and ‘Smith has pain.’ Rather, it corresponds to the difference between moaning and saying that someone moans” (BB, p. 68). There is no doubt that when Wittgenstein wrote out carefully what he wanted to say, it was definitely not that the uttered sentence “I’m in pain” stands for moaning, but instead that it replaces or is a substitute for moaning. This is how he puts it in the Philosophical Investigations:6

A child has hurt himself and he cries: and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and later sentences. They teach the child new pain behavior. “So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying? ... On the contrary, the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it” (PI, p. 244).

This way of looking at the first person present psychological sentences sharply diverged from the Tractatus. For there the view was that every spoken meaningful sentence expresses a thought. For a sentence is a logical picture of a possible fact (4.03): and any logical picture of a possible fact is a thought (3). But in the new conception the first person psychological sentences are not thoughts and do not express thoughts. They do express something; that is why they are called Ausserungen (“expressions”). They express sensations, emotions, feelings, moods—not thoughts. This is an important distinction. In the Investigations Wittgenstein suggests that our perplexities about the relation between behavior and sensation, and our temptation to suppose that the language in which we refer to our sensations must be founded on inner ostensive definitions, will disappear only if we make a radical break with the idea that language functions always in one way, always serves the same purpose: to transmit thoughts be these thoughts about houses, pains, good and evil, or whatever (PI, p. 304).

A few paragraphs later he says:

Misleading parallel: a cry, an expression of pain --a sentence, an expression of thought.

As if the purpose of the sentence were to let one person know how the other feels, only, so to speak, in his thinking part and not in his stomach (PI, p. 317).

Still later, there is this comment:

“The purpose of language is to express thoughts.” --So presumably the
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purpose of every sentence is to express a thought. Then what thought is
expressed, for example, by the sentence "It's raining"? (PI, p. 501).
In the ordinary meaning of "a thought," a person who looks out the window and
exclaims (perhaps with pleasure, or with dismay), "It's raining," may not have any
thought. The words may have expressed pleasure or dismay, but not a thought.
The conception of the Tractatus that a meaningful sentence necessarily ex­
presses a thought, continues to exert a fascination on philosophers. There is an
inclination to suppose that if a person, A, utters a sentence "p" to a person, B,
then A should have the intention to get B to think that A thinks that p. In a recent
paper, Carl Ginet imagines a case in which "an English speaker riding in a moving
car utters the sounds 'I see a blinking red light ahead' and means by the utterance
what any English speaker ordinarily would in such circumstances." I would say
that there is already a mistake here: namely, the assumption that there is some
one and the same thing that any English speaker would ordinarily mean in such a
case. Ginet goes on to say:

The utterer's meaning depends on the utterer's having the intention to
obey a certain rule in making the utterance, which could be expressed in
the following way: if one utters that sort of sound in that sort of circum­
stances then one should have the following sort of intention in doing so:
to get the intended recipient of one's utterance to think that one thinks
that one sees a blinking red light ahead (ibid).
Let me change the example slightly. Suppose that you are driving a car and I
am your passenger. Occasionally there are icy stretches on the road, and both of us are
aware of this, and both of us realize that one should drive with care over such icy
stretches. I say to you, "I see an icy stretch just ahead." My intention would be to
warn you, not to get you to think that I think I see an icy stretch ahead. Ginet's
remarks provide a good illustration of the temptation of which Wittgenstein spoke,
namely, to suppose that in uttering sentences in ordinary life we always have the
purpose of transmitting and evoking thoughts. One can see how queer is the inten­
tion that, according to Ginet, the normal English speaker is supposed to have, if
we imagine that I actually put it into words: "I want you to think that I think I
see an icy stretch ahead." I am sure you would regard this as a strange remark. On
Ginet's view my intention in saying that would presumably be to get you to think
that I think I want you to think that I think I see an icy stretch ahead.
I suspect that Ginet would be inclined to support his view by the following
argument: If you were to think that I do not think that I see an icy stretch ahead,
then you would not take my remark as a warning. Which is true. But this argument
would be making the assumption that either you would think that I think so-and-so,
or you would think that I do not think so-and-so. This is a mistake. In the normal
case you would think neither the one thing nor the other. You would simply take
my remark as a warning, and probably act on it.

7. Let us return to Wittgenstein's characterization of first person psychological
utterances as "expressions" (Ausserungen). In Zettel he presents a brief sketch
for the treatment of psychological concepts. The first remark is: 'Psychological
verbs characterized by the fact that the third person of the present is to be verified by observation, the first person not." The next remark is: "Sentences in the third person of the present: information (Mitteilung). In the first person present: expression (Ausserung)." Then is added in parenthesis: "Not quite right;" Wittgenstein then says: "The first person of the present akin to an expression (Ausserung) (Z. p. 472; my emphasis). What Wittgenstein is saying is that the verbal utterance, "I'm in pain," is like a natural, nonverbal expression of pain, such as a groan or grimace. The word "akin" should prepare us to note differences as well as similarities.

8. An obvious difference is that the utterance "I'm in pain" is a sentence, whereas a groan or facial contortion is not. Some philosophers have labored over the question of whether Wittgenstein affirms or denies that verbal "expressions" are true or false. Peter Hacker, in his book Insight and Illusion, makes heavy going of this issue. He says that the "most common interpretation" of Wittgenstein on first person, present, psychological utterances is that they do not "bear truth-values." He attributes this interpretation to me: "As is notorious, Malcolm defends the claim," says Hacker, "that such utterances can be neither true nor false, but should be assimilated to behavioral manifestations of psychological states" (Hacker, p. 252).

Leaving notoriety aside, I have never said nor believed that such utterances are neither true nor false. It is obvious that if I say "I have a headache," I can be saying something true—that is, "telling the truth": or I can be saying something false—that is, lying or faking. It is worth noting that "I have a headache" (said by me) must have the same truth-value as "he has a headache" (said about me). If a person is groaning we do not say that his groaning is "false" but rather that he is "pretending," "faking," or "putting it on." Nor do we say that his groaning is "true" but rather that it is "genuine."

I know of no evidence that Wittgenstein ever held that the utterance "I have a toothache" is neither true nor false. What we should expect him to say is that the words "true" and "false" are used differently, have a different logical grammar, when applied to verbal "expressions," from what they have when applied to a statement such as "I have a decayed tooth." In the Investigations Wittgenstein imagines that he is saying something to himself in thought and another person is guessing what it is. What would be the criterion for the latter's guessing right? Surely nothing else than Wittgenstein's admitting that the other guessed right. A person's admitting that he was thinking so-and-so to himself would be an "expression"; and Wittgenstein remarks that the truth of this admission "is guaranteed by the special criteria of truthfulness" (PI, p. 222). The words "true" or "false" have just as much application to the expression "I have a toothache" as to the statement "I have a decayed tooth." But it is a different use of the words "true" and "false". The truth of the expression, but not of the statement, is guaranteed by its being truthful.

In Zettel Wittgenstein observes that it is misleading to call a verbal "expression" a statement or assertion (Behauptung). "To call the expression (Ausserung) of a sensation a statement is misleading, because 'testing,' 'justification,' 'confirmation,' 'refutation' of a statement are connected with the word 'statement' in the
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language-game” (Z, p. 549). What Wittgenstein is saying here is not that in ordinary
language it is incorrect to call a verbal “expression” a statement, but only that it is
philosophically misleading.

9. Did Wittgenstein deny that verbal expressions of sensations, emotion, mood,
are descriptions? Apparently at first he had this inclination. In the “Notes for Lec­
tures” he says:
You couldn’t call moaning a description: But this shows you how far the
proposition ‘I have a toothache’ is from a description, and how far teach­
ing the word ‘toothache’ is from teaching the word ‘tooth’ (NFL, p. 320).
But in the Investigations his treatment of this question is far more subtle;
Are the words “I am afraid” a description of a state of mind? I say
“I am afraid”; someone else asks me: “What was that? A cry of fear;
or do you want to tell me how you feel; or is it a reflection on your
present state?” ---Could I always give him a clear answer? Could I never
give him one?
We can imagine all sorts of things here, for example: “No, no! I am
afraid.”
“I am afraid. I am sorry to have to confess it.”
“I am still a bit afraid, but no longer as much as before.”
“At bottom I am still afraid, though I won’t admit it to myself.”
“I torment myself with all sorts of fears.”
“Now, just when I should be fearless, I am afraid.”
To each of these sentences a special tone of voice is appropriate, and a
different context. It would be possible to imagine people who as it were
thought much more definitely than we do, and used different words
where we use only one.
We ask, “What does ‘I am frightened’ really mean, what am I referring
to when I say it?” And of course we find no answer, or one that is inade­
quate. The question is: “In what sort of context does it occur?” . . . De­
scribing my state of mind (of fear, say) is something I do in a particular
context. (Just as it takes a particular context to make a certain action
into an experiment.) (PI, pp. 188-189).
A cry is not a description. But there are transitions. And the words “I am afraid” may approximate more, or less, to a cry. They may come
quite close to it, and also be far removed from it.
We surely do not always say someone is complaining, because he says he
is in pain. So the words, “I am in pain,” may be a complaint, and may
be something else. But if “I am afraid” is not always like a complaint, and
yet sometimes is, then why should it always be a description of a state
of mind? (PI, p. 189).
Wittgenstein’s question, why should the utterance “I am afraid” always be a de­
scription of a state of mind?, discloses his target, namely the philosophical urge to
think that the first person psychological sentences must be descriptions (or reports),
either of inner mental states or of outer behavior, and accordingly they must be
verifiable by the speaker’s observation of himself, either inwardly or outwardly.
This picture was rejected by Wittgenstein from the time of his realization (in 1932-33) that the concept of verification does not apply to the first person psychological sentences.

When we reflect on our actual use of these sentences we see that the utterance "I am afraid" is properly called, in one context, a "description" of one's mental state; in another context it is instead a cry for help; in another it is a confession; in still another it is a self-reproach; and so on. Seeing this, we can reject the foregoing philosophical picture, without being required to maintain that this utterance is never a description.

10. But I may have spoken too optimistically in saying that we can reject the philosophical picture. Perhaps it is stronger than we are. Of utterances such as "I'm afraid," "I'm in pain," "I hope he will get well," "I intend to go to Vienna," we have an overwhelming inclination to say: "They are propositions, and when I utter them they are assertions or statements about myself. And I know whether they are true or false. This knowledge must be based on my observation of myself."

All of these somewhat hysterical remarks are either misleading, confusing, or nonsensical. It is misleading to call these first person utterances "propositions," just as it is to call them "statements" or "assertions." For this classification invites us to assimilate them to such a proposition (assertion, statement) as "Syracuse is fifty miles from Ithaca," a proposition about a reality that is as it is, in complete logical independence of its utterance by a speaker. To say "I know I intend to go to Vienna" is confusing; for what is it supposed to mean? The prefix, "I know," does not seem to be doing any work here, except possibly to provide emphasis; in which case the whole sentence is equivalent to "I do intend to go to Vienna" --but at the same time the prefix, "I know," fosters the illusion that I am aware of something that informs me of my own intention. To say that I need to observe myself to find out my own intention is nonsensical: for what would I look for; and what would it mean to wonder whether my observation was carried out correctly or incorrectly?

(I do not of course mean to deny that sometimes reflection on one's own past actions, reactions, agitations, may yield new insight; may make one aware, or more aware, of one's fears, hopes, anxieties. But to the extent that a remark such as "I really dislike him" or "I am afraid of her," has its origin in such reflection or recollection, to the same extent it diverges from the role of being a pure "expression" of fear or dislike and has more of the character of a conclusion about oneself.)

In likening the utterance "I'm in pain" to a groan of pain, Wittgenstein is not of course declaring that it is a groan of pain. He is pointing out a similarity that, once seen, helped him, and may help us, to be freed from the foregoing tangle of misleading, confusing, or nonsensical ideas. The similarity is not something that Wittgenstein invented; it is really there. It is nonsense to suppose that there might be sensation, or fear, or hope, or intention, without these ever being expressed and exhibited in human behavior. The first person utterances, the "expressions," are a part of that expressive behavior. By being sentences they differ from nonverbal expressive behavior. But so are there differences within this latter category. Flinching with pain is not deliberate, whereas soothing the sore place might be. Rude
shouting may express anger, but so may cold politeness. Why should it be thought strange that saying "I hope he will come," may be an expression of hope --and not indirectly, through the mediation of a thought, but just as directly as wringing one's hands, or pacing back and forth, may be an expression of the hope that he will come? When adults teach a child to say "It hurts" instead of crying out when the sore place is touched, it is literally true that "they teach the child new pain-behavior" (PI, p. 244), behavior that is expressive of pain in the same direct way as is the cry that it replaces.

11. Though it may be conceded that the first person utterances are a part of expressive behavior, one may want to insist that nevertheless they are "radically different" from nonverbal expressive behavior. Of course they are different. But why "radically"? Behind this emphasis is the persisting urge to view them as "statements" or "propositions," and to hold that they are put forward as "corresponding with reality." The next move is to say that each person knows whether his first person psychological utterances are true or false, and hence he must have actually compared them with the facts.

My repetition of these obsessive claims is meant to indicate how fierce and unyielding they are.

Let us dwell further on the notion that one might compare one's first person psychological utterances with the facts. This would be in accordance with the general claim of the Tractatus that "Reality is compared with propositions" (4.05). First person psychological sentences are, from the standpoint of ordinary grammar, subject-predicate sentences. The pronoun "I" is the grammatical subject, and "am in pain," or "am angry," or "intend to go to Vienna," are grammatical predicates.

Wittgenstein brought to light, what is by now a familiar point, that I do not "identify my sensation by criteria" (PI, p. 290). As he says in Zettel:

I infer that he needs to go to the doctor from observation of his behavior; but I do not make this inference in my own case from observation of my behavior. Or rather, I do this too sometimes, but not in analogous cases (Z, p. 539).

It is a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is—and so to pay attention to other people's pain-behavior, as one does not pay attention to one's own pain-behavior (Z, p. 540).

What Wittgenstein is saying here of sensation predicates holds for many psychological predicates. For example:

What is the criterion for the sameness of two images?—What is the criterion for the redness of an image? For me, when it is someone else's image: what he says and does. For myself, when it is my image: nothing. And what goes for "red" also goes for "same" (PI, p. 377).

The Tractatus says that a sentence "is laid against reality like a ruler" (2.1512). Measurement by a ruler is a criterion of length. I said previously that the Verification Principle is neither stated nor apparently implied in the Tractatus. But the analogy between a sentence and a ruler certainly suggests that one does not understand a
sentence unless one knows how to compare it with reality--just as one does not understand the use of a ruler if one does not know how to measure with it. Thus there seems to be a veiled assumption in the Tractatus that all meaningful sentences are employed in accordance with criteria. But, as Wittgenstein came to realize, this is not so, in many cases, when one applies a psychological predicate to oneself. This certainly undermines the notion that first person psychological sentences are compared with reality--for their predicates are not treated in this way.

12. Let us turn from the predicates to the grammatical subject, the pronoun “I”. Wittgenstein makes some startling observations about the use of this word. In The Blue Book he says that “In ‘I have pain,’ ‘I’ is not a demonstrative pronoun” (BB, p. 68). This would seem to be an exceedingly paradoxical remark. In ordinary grammar “I” is classified as a demonstrative pronoun. What can Wittgenstein mean?

Let us ask, what does one do with a demonstrative? What is its function? The answer is that the words “this,” “that,” “he,” “she,” are used to refer to, indicate, pick out, someone or something. Which person or thing the demonstrative refers to is shown by a pointing gesture, or by a previously given name or description, or by the context of previous or subsequent remarks. Wittgenstein's point in saying that the “I” in “I'm in pain” is not a demonstrative pronoun would presumably be that the “I” is not used there to refer to, or to designate, or to pick out one particular person from others. That this is what he is saying is supported by the following remark from the Investigations:

“But at any rate when you say ‘I am in pain,’ you want to draw the attention of others to a particular person.” --The answer might be: No, I want to draw their attention to myself (PI, p. 405).

There is of course no logical significance in the fact that in English we have the two words “I” and “myself” (or in German “Ich” and “mich selbst”) instead of the one word “I”. There is no difference in meaning between “Roger, Alfred, and myself were in the room” and “Roger, Alfred, and I were in the room.” If there is a use of “I” in which it does not refer to “a particular person,” this would also be true of “myself” or “me” when those words replace “I.”

The interpretation of Wittgenstein’s point as meaning that the “I” in “I’m in pain,” does not refer to any particular person, is confirmed by the following paragraphs:

“When I say ‘I am in pain,’ I do not point to a person who is in pain, since in a certain sense I do not know at all who is.” And this can be justified. For the main point is: I did not say that such-and-such a person is in pain, but “I am ...” Now in saying this I don’t name any person. Just as I don’t name anyone when I groan with pain, though someone else sees who is in pain from the groaning. What does it mean to know who is in pain? It means, for example, to know which man in this room is in pain: for instance, that it is the one who is sitting over there, or the one who is standing in that corner, the tall one over there with the fair hair, and so on. --What am I getting at? At the fact that there is a great variety of criteria for personal ‘identity’. Now which
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of them determines my saying that 'I' am in pain? None. (PI, p. 404).
Wittgenstein's point is blunted here by his remark that when I say "I'm in pain" I
don't “name” (nenne) any person. For it is also the case that when I say "He is in
pain" (pointing) I don't name any person. The point is better put like this: When I
say "I'm in pain" I do not refer to, designate, or identify any person.

It is possible that a person suffering from amnesia should not remember his
name, nor any of his past history, nor anything at all about himself—that is, should
literally not know who he is. Yet this would not deprive his utterance "I'm in pain"
of meaning. One might object that it is also true that I can say of another person,
"He is in pain," without knowing who he is. But I could point to him. What I
would mean is that the person at whom I am pointing is in pain. In this sense I do
know who is in pain. If it is objected that the man with amnesia could point to
himself when he says "I'm in pain," the answer is that this would be an idle employ-
ment of a pointing gesture. In The Blue Book Wittgenstein imagines someone saying:

But surely the word "I" in the mouth of a man refers to the man who
says it; points to himself; and very often a man who says it actually
points to himself with his finger (BB, p. 67).

Wittgenstein's reply is:

But it was quite superfluous to point to himself. He might just as well
only have raised his hand. It would be wrong to say that when someone
points to the sun with his hand, he is pointing both to the sun and him-
self because it is he who points; on the other hand, he may by pointing
attract attention both to the sun and to himself (ibid.).

In saying "I'm in pain" I may attract attention to myself; but so may I by
crying out in pain. In neither case do I refer to, designate, or identify a particular
person. If I supplemented my utterance "I'm in pain" with the description, "The
person in pain is the one who is saying 'I'm in pain'," this description might fail to
single out a particular person, since someone else nearby might also be exclaiming
"I'm in pain." This other person might also be pointing to himself; so I would not
distinguish one person from all others by pointing to myself and saying, "The per-
son in pain is the one who is pointing to himself." In short, I might be unable to
identify myself by any distinguishing feature whatever; yet this would in no way
take away from the meaning of my utterance "I'm in pain." My use of the
word "I" here does not rely on or presuppose an ability to supplement the "I"
with a description, name, or pointing gesture. It is literally true, therefore, even
though at first thought paradoxical, that in this use the "I" is not a demonstrative
pronoun. It is not even a pronoun; for it does not stand for, nor is used in place of,
any name, designation, or identifying description. It is no exaggeration to say that
in this use the "I" is not a referring expression.

13. We have been dwelling on the inclination to think that one compares one's
own first person present psychological utterances (one's "Expressions") with reality.
Our primary example has been the utterance "I'm in pain," because Wittgenstein's
insights are mostly presented in terms of this example. Yet the points made carry
over to a large number of other first person psychological utterances. We took such
utterances to be divisible into grammatical predicate and grammatical subject. We saw that such predicates as "am angry," "am afraid," "am expecting him any moment," are not normally employed in accordance with any criteria. It seems wrong, therefore, to say that in applying these predicates to oneself one "compares them with reality," or determines whether they match the facts.

In respect to the grammatical subject, the "I," I hope we have seen that it is not used in the first person psychological utterances to pick out, designate, or refer to, a particular person. In employing those sentences we are not referring to some person, under some description or designation, and saying that that person is angry, or afraid, or expecting someone.

If all of this is correct, as it seems to be, then the notion that one compares one's first person psychological utterances with reality, does not have a leg to stand on. If one does not employ the predicates in accordance with any criteria, then one is not trying to determine whether the predicates fit either inner mental states or outer behavior. In addition, if one does not use the subject term, the "I," to refer to anyone or anything, then one is not trying to determine whether the predicate is true of some particular person or thing.

Adding up these two points, I cannot imagine a more decisive refutation of the notion that one compares these utterances with the facts, and of the connected notions that one verifies, or perceives, or observes, or knows, that the utterances are true (or false). The destruction of these notions should help us to appreciate the analogy that Wittgenstein makes between the first person psychological utterances and nonverbal, behavioral expressions of sensation, hope, fear, expectation, intention. It seems entirely wrong to regard these first person utterances as statements or propositions that are or can be compared by the speaker with the facts. But though they are not offered by a speaker as statements based on some observation of himself, this does not prevent them from being informative to others. For they are informative in the same way as are nonverbal, behavioral expressions of sensation, emotion, expectation, or intention. In both cases they provide others with grounds for conclusions and predictions about the person, and therefore with knowledge of them.

FOOTNOTES

Footnotes Continued...
