

# Acquaintance & the Private Language Argument

# The Acquaintance View

- *Grasping properties* – At least some properties can be grasped, where one grasps a property iff one understands what it is for the property to be instantiated, e.g. one grasps sphericity iff one understands that for something to be spherical is for all points on its surface to be equidistant from its centre.
- *Grasping simple properties* – Some *simple* properties can be grasped, even though what is understood in grasping them cannot be expressed in more fundamental terms, e.g. existence, possibility, necessity, causation.
- *Acquaintance* – In normal circumstances, when a person P attends to a sensation S that she is currently having, P thereby grasps S, i.e. it is apparent to P what it is for someone to have S, e.g. when I attend a certain pain it is apparent to me what it is for someone to feel that way.

# Accounting for Reference in *Thought*

- 'How [is an ostensive definition possible]?...– Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. – But “I impress on myself” can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right' (258).
- *Response* – The attention to sensation S fixes reference in virtue of its allowing me to grasp the nature of S.
- *A coherent scenario* – A person with radically defective short term memory might at time T1 grasp sensation S1, and at T2 grasp a sensation S2, and mistakenly judge that at T1 and T2 she grasped the same property.
- Therefore, I see no reason to accept that 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right'. Even though sensations are 'subjective' (just in the sense that they are states of subjective experience), it is perfectly objective which sensations I *have*, and consequently which sensations I *grasp*.

# Accounting for Reference in *Language*

- *1<sup>st</sup> Problem* – One's access to sensations is private, whereas language is public.
- *2<sup>nd</sup> Problem* – Whereas paradigmatic thought about sensation is extremely precise, any public language term for a sensation refers to an extremely broad and vaguely specified range of sensations.
- The move from reference to sensations in thought to reference to sensations in language is dependent on:
  - A/ The fact that sensations have a certain causal role, i.e. they are typically caused by certain sensory inputs and cause certain behavioural outputs (but I don't think we need to suppose the connection between sensation and causal role is conceptual, or even necessary)
  - B/ The anti-skeptical assumption that *ceteris paribus* sensations which play the same causal role (in different humans) are similar.

# The Problem with Practice

- There is some number,  $n$ , so huge that human beings will never apply '+' to it.
- ' $x$  quus  $y$ ' =  $x + y$  if  $x, y < n$ , and = 5 otherwise
- Human practice does not determine whether humans mean plus or quus by '+'
- What the solution? Phenomenal intentionality, i.e. the intentionality intrinsic to consciousness.