PRIVATE LANGUAGE IN PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS: THE VIABILITY OF HINTIKKAS' INTERPRETATION

Jure Zovko, Mate Penava

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1Hintikka, J.
1Hintikka, M.
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Abstract

In this paper, we analyze Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka's interpretation of Wittgenstein's arguments against epistemic privacy. The main focus of the paper is to explore their views on this issue and examine the connections between their argumentation and that of Saul Kripke to see to what extent these views coincide. The reason for comparing the said authors is that they all oppose the received view of the argument against private language, which claims that the discussion of private language begins with PI 243. In fact, these philosophers claim that Wittgenstein already discussed the issue of the impossibility of a private language in his rule–following reflections, especially in PI 201 and 202. We will also explore some drawbacks of the interpretation of Wittgenstein offered by the Hintikkas and attempt to provide an overall perspective of the viability of their position in relation to Wittgenstein's argument against epistemic privacy.

Keywords: Ludwig Wittgenstein, rule–following, private language, intersubjectivity, Saul Kripke; the Hintikkas

- * Professor Emeritus Jure Zovko, PhD, University of Zadar, Department of Philosophy, Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV., 23000 Zadar, Croatia. E-mail: jzovko@unizd.hr ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2937-2612
- ** Mate Penava, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Zadar, Department of Philosophy, Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV., 23000 Zadar, Croatia. E-mail: mpenava21@unizd.hr ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4735-6533
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1. The Hintikkas on the Private Language Argument

In contrast to the usual interpretations of Wittgenstein's "private language argument", e.g., Baker & Hacker (1984), Mulhall (2007), and many others, the Hintikkas (1986) claim that the argumentation contained in PI 243–315 is just a special case of the argument Wittgenstein presented in the paragraphs before, dealing with rule–following (PI 143–242).

"If Wittgenstein had a rock-bottom 'private language argument', that is, an argument against the possibility of private languages, it is his discussion of rule-following in PI, I, secs. 143–242." (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 243)

A similar stance on this issue can be found in Fogelin (1987) and Kripke (1982), while Kusch (2006) presents a defense of Kripke's argumentation.

According to the Hintikkas, Wittgenstein's reflections about epistemic privacy rely heavily on the concept of language games and rules established through practices. They find evidence for this line of thought in many places throughout both published and unpublished Wittgenstein's writings. One of the pivotal points is PI 202:

"That's why 'following a rule' is a practice. And to think one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule 'privately'; otherwise, thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following it." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 87–8e)

and another is, according to the Hintikkas, in unpublished MS 116:

"There is surely (such a thing as) a subjective rule (*Regelmäßigkiet*), a rule which exists only for *me*.' That is: we frequently use the word 'rule' thus: someone imagines to himself a rule; he sees something rule governed; something strikes him as rule–governed; etc. But that does not mean that he has in mind an object which is unknown to all of us and which is called 'rule'. If, over and above the game which I see, he is also playing a game with himself which I know *nothing* about, I don't know either whether it is to be called a 'game'. If, over and above the public language, he also speaks a private language which I know nothing about, why do I call it a language." (Quoted according to Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 243)

An important corollary of this stance is that Wittgenstein's remarks about epistemic privacy later in the PI (§243–315) should not be taken as an independent argument against the possibility of a private language, but as something which is dependent upon the framework of rules and practices Wittgenstein built earlier in the book. So, when Wittgenstein asks, e.g., in PI 244, how the connection of the name and the thing that is named is to be established, he assumes that this connection has to be established on the basis of a language game. Consequently, the role of PI 243–315 is only to show that we do not need a private language when talking about our inner sensations and feelings, and not as an argument against a private language in general. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 244–5)

The Hintikkas stress the importance of Wittgenstein's shift in 1929 from a phenomenological to a physicalist language, as he now needed a way of talking about the world of phenomenological experience which would be compatible with the language we use to talk about the everyday physical objects. (cf. Hintikka & Hintikka, 1986, 247) Although the Hintikkas' claim that Wittgenstein was a proponent of a phenomenological language in *Tractatus* has sparked many disagreements among scholars, it seems to us that *Philosophical Grammar* (PG) can serve as a hint to this. Here, Wittgenstein acknowledges that:

"If you want to use the appellation 'elementary proposition' as I did in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, and as Russell used 'atomic proposition', you may call the sentence 'Here there is a red rose' an elementary proposition. That is to say, it doesn't contain a truth-function and it isn't defined by an expression which contains one. But if we're to say that a proposition isn't an elementary proposition unless its complete logical analysis shows that it isn't built out of other propositions by truth-functions, we are presupposing that we have an idea of what such an 'analysis' would be. Formerly, I myself spoke of a 'complete analysis', and I used to believe that philosophy had to give a definitive dissection of propositions so as to set out clearly all their connections and remove all possibilities of misunderstanding. I spoke as if there was a calculus in which such a dissection would be possible. I vaguely had in mind something like the definition that Russell had given for the definite article, and I used to think that in a similar way one would be able to use visual impressions etc. to define the concept say of a sphere, and thus exhibit once for all the connections between the concepts and lay bare the source of all misunderstandings, etc. At the root of all this there was a false and idealized picture of the use of language." (Wittgenstein 1974, 211)

According to the Hintikkas and contrary to the received view, Wittgenstein does not deny the reality of sensations and their role in the semantics of our sensations discourse. The problem arises when we construe that semantics using an incorrect model. As the world we live in is, for Wittgenstein, the world of sense data, the problem is how to speak of this sense data using the only language we understand, namely the everyday language referring to physical objects. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 249–50)

According to the Hintikkas, the model Wittgenstein was criticizing using the private language argument is the model of 'object and signifying', i.e., a model of reference that is not mediated by any language game. Inside this model, a sign refers to its object directly, without the need for a public framework. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 254) What "signifying" (*Bezeichnung*) means is best seen if we look at PI 15, where we find:

"The word 'signify' is perhaps most straightforwardly applied when the *name* [emphasis added] is actually a mark on the object signified. Suppose that the tools A uses in building bear certain marks. When A shows his assistant such a mark, the assistant brings the tool that has that mark on it.

In this way, and in more or less similar ways, a name signifies a thing, and is given to a thing. — When philosophizing, it will often prove useful to say to ourselves: naming something is rather like attaching a name tag to a thing. (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 10e)

According to the Hintikkas, Wittgenstein says in PI 256 that the relation between a name and its object can be epistemically private only if we interpret it on the basis of the signifying (*Bezeichnung*) model. Naming, as different from signifying, can occur only inside a public context. Therefore, the *Bezeichnung* model must be discarded because it fails to meet the requirement of being judged in a public context.

To further illustrate the validity of the argument put forward by the Hintikkas, we will look at PI 256 and 257:

"How do I use words to signify my sensations? — As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a 'private' one. Someone else might understand it as well as I. — But suppose I didn't have any natural expression of sensation, but only had sensations? And now I simply associate names with sensations, and use these names in descriptions."

"What would it be like if human beings did not manifest their pains (did not groan, grimace, etc.)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word 'toothache'.' — Well, let's assume that the child is a genius and invents a name for the sensation by himself! — But then, of course, he couldn't make himself understood when he used the word. — So does he understand the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone? — But what does it mean to say that he has 'named his pain'? — How has he managed this naming of pain? And whatever he did, what was its purpose? — When one says "He gave a name to his sensation", one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense. And if we speak of someone's giving a name to a pain, the grammar of the word 'pain' is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 98e)

The Hintikkas rightly stress that Zeichen and bezeichnen should be translated as sign and signifying. If we conflate naming and signifying, this causes a great problem in PI 293, because Wittgenstein here uses the word Bezeichnung on purpose to highlight the absence of a language game within which a talk of inner sensations can have meaning. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 256)

"Well, everyone tells me of himself that he only knows from himself what pain is! — Suppose that everyone had a box with something in it which we call a 'beetle'. No one can ever look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. — Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. — But what if these people's word 'beetle' had a use nonetheless? — If so, it would not be as the *name* [emphasis added] of a thing. The thing in the box doesn't belong to the language–game at all; not even as a Something: for the box might even be empty. — No, one can 'divide

through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is. That is to say, if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and *name*' [emphasis added], the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 106–7e)

Therefore, in dealing with private language, Wittgenstein actually criticizes the model of simple signifying or *Bezeichnung*. This model functions on ostensive definitions and such definitions are impossible in a private context, what consequently leads this model to fail. The critique of the epistemic privacy of a language is again shown to be a corollary of previous sections of PI, namely those dealing with language games and the inadequacy of ostensive definitions. If we want the word 'beetle' to have a role in the language of the person who is reporting about it, that word needs a language game to function in, which is again an example of Wittgenstein's point that the real critique of epistemic privacy and the *Bezeichnung* model with it is contained in PI 143–242 and that PI 243–315 are just an application of the already established framework on the issue of inner sensations. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 255–6)

What is most important here is Wittgenstein's account of the nature of the framework inside which we speak about epistemically private experiences. A classic example of this framework is, according to the Hintikkas, PI 244:

"How do words refer to sensations? — There doesn't seem to be any problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day, and name them? But how is the connection between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: How does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations? For example, of the word "pain". Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 95e)

The model described here the Hintikkas call a *physiognomic framework* and the basis for it is grammatical rather than factual. This framework will include facial expressions, gestures and other bodily movements, and the language which is formed on this framework will be called a *physiognomic language*. This language can also include reactions from other people to somebody's bodily movements. Epistemically private experiences thus enter into language games through their physiognomic correlates and their mutual link is not contingent or epistemic, it is rather logical (semantical) as it constitutes the language games in question. As epistemically private experiences are logically linked with their public manifestations through being a foundation for the meaningful talk about themselves inside a language game, they are an essential part of the relevant language games, and this is

the sense in which Wittgenstein is denying the possibility of a private language. (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 257–8).

Moreover, we consider that in private experiences like pain, sensations are usually conveyed in the context described by language games, and as physiognomic gesticulations, they are already inside various language games. The gesticulations of those who have a toothache differ substantially from those who suffer from knee pain. In both cases, something common to existing pain is articulated, which for Wittgenstein is an articulation of the language game of exhibiting pain behavior. I can bear my toothache stoically, but because of knee pain, I have to limp when I walk, so other people can infer that I obviously have knee pain.

2. The Hintikkas vs. Kripke — Differences and Similarities

The main reason to draw a comparison between Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein's views on epistemic privacy and the interpretation put forth by the Hintikkas is the fact that both interpretations decided to go against the received view and show that the entire premise that the private language argument starts at PI 243 is deeply mistaken and that we should direct our attention to preceding paragraphs if we want to have a clear picture of the argument. Although Fogelin (1987) is another exception from the received view, we shall confine our comparison to Kripke and the Hintikkas. The starting point of both interpretations is the same. Namely, the two interpretations emphasize the importance of PI 202 and the fact that you cannot follow a rule privately, i.e., following a rule is some kind of a practice established inside a social context, community, or lifeworld. As we saw earlier, the Hintikkas put the main emphasis on language games and their public character, extrapolating the inadequacy of the Bezeichnung model from this supposition and subsequently the impossibility of a private language. On the other hand, Kripke interprets the entire case through an example of his own, regarding (qu)addition. Namely, what justification do we have to claim that any addition that has followed the well-established mathematical rules will do so on the next occasion? For example, what justification do we have that adding numbers larger than we have ever added will result in the usual result and not something quite different. Kripke offers us the example of the addition of 68 + 57 and asks what justification we have to claim that the result will be 125, and not 5, if we, for the sake of the argument, consider that these numbers are larger than any numbers we have dealt with so far. He then goes on to say that we do not need this conclusiveness. In other words, Kripke asks what justification there is to follow the same rule on a new, yet unencountered occasion. The skeptic says that we have always calculated in the latter manner and now, under some influence, retracted to the former

manner and that we have no way of conclusively proving this is not true. (cf. Kripke 1982, 8–11) Kripke then goes on to agree with the skeptic that there is no way in which we can conclusively prove her wrong. (cf. Kripke 1982, 68–9) In other words, he utilizes PI 202 to set up a communitarian view of language and rule following, stating that the community of language users which we form a part of is the arbiter of our right or wrong usage of a term or a mathematical operation. (cf. Kripke 1982, 89–90) How does this compare to the Hintikkas?

We can first look at an obvious point where it seems that the Hintikkas express their views about Kripke's interpretation, although they do not mention his name. Namely, in Hintikka & Hintikka (1986, 260) we find that "[to] assimilate Wittgenstein's argument to skeptical ones is radically to misunderstand their nature". Taking into consideration that the book by Hintikka & Hintikka was published in 1986 and Kripke's in 1982, it is highly likely that the Hintikkas were aiming at Kripke with this comment. However, Kusch (2006) clearly demonstrates that Kripke's views on this issue are remarkably similar to the ones expressed by the Hintikkas. Although it is true that Kripke presents his argument in epistemological terms, his argument is not concerned with knowledge about any fact that makes it so that we meant addition by "+" in the past. The crucial question is whether there is or can be any such fact in the first place. (cf. Kusch 2006, 204) We find direct confirmation for this in Kripke's book:

"[I]t is clear that the sceptical challenge is not really an epistemological one. It purports to show that nothing in my mental history of past behaviour — not even what an omniscient God would know — could establish whether I meant plus or quus. But then it appears to follow that there was no fact about me that constituted my having meant plus rather than quus." (Kripke 1982, 21)

Subsequently, Hintikkas' observation (cf. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 259) that the tendency to separate the semantic and the epistemological part of the argument is mistaken and that epistemological considerations play no role in the argument against epistemic privacy coincide with Kripke's view on the issue. The skeptical paradox is merely an expositional device for Kripke, while his main point is very similar to the Hintikkas' interpretation of Wittgenstein's argument.

Namely, the views of these philosophers coincide on their emphasis of the role of community. The Hintikkas are speaking about language games and the necessity of their public character and it is clear that these language games have to be played by the members of a community. Hence, the notions Kripke emphasizes (agreement, criteria) come into play if we investigate this line of thought further.

3. Some Problems With the Interpretation Offered by the Hintikkas

The main issue that needs to be stressed here is the metaphysical Cartesianism, a view the Hintikkas attribute to Wittgenstein. It can be expressed in the following lines:

"[F]or Wittgenstein there really were private event–like experiences, including pains and other such sensations." (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 265)

Some further corollaries stem from this general stance:

"It is important to notice that the inaccessibility of my beetle to others does not imply that it is impossible for me to compare my private beetle with public ones or for you to test my comparisons." (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 266)

"To put the same point in another way, once a suitable language game has been established in a public domain, it can in special (and admittedly parasitic) cases be extended to private objects." (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, 266)

They find support for such a thesis in PI 272:

"The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have this or something else. The assumption would thus be possible a though unverifiable a that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red, and another section another." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 102e)

and some passages from *Zettel* that focus on what they call parasitic language games. For example, when Wittgenstein says in *Zettel* 75:

"I can attend to the course of my pains, but not in the same way to that of my belief, or my translation, or my knowledge" (Wittgenstein 1975 [1967], 15e).

or in Zettel 82:

"Think of this language–game: Determine how long an impression lasts by means of a stopwatch" (Wittgenstein 1975 [1967], 16e).

The Hintikkas claim that this view is discarded by the received view among Wittgenstein scholars. However, the main focus of the Wittgenstein scholars has been to show that these private objects cannot enter into the respective language games, not that they do not exist. Notable examples here include Mulhall (2007) and Stern (2004), as both of these authors place emphasis on the first, and not the second issue.

As Wittgenstein himself put it in PI 270:

"We, as it were, turned a knob which looked as if it could be used to adjust something in the machine; but it was a mere ornament not connected with the mechanism at all." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 101e)

All attempts to connect Wittgenstein's analysis of inner sensations with Cartesianism are, in our opinion, mistaken, because Descartes did not reach the dimension of the universality of language games and their application in the concrete case with his "cogito approach". For Wittgenstein, the Cartesian "cogito" remains on the level of solipsism because it fails to incorporate the intersubjective aspect of language that is crucial for Wittgenstein's approach to language in his later philosophy. The intersubjective nature of language functions as the accepted background of any language game. Furthermore, Wittgenstein claims that the talk about private sensations could make sense without the private sensations being present at all (the beetle–box could be empty), while the perspective put forward by the Hintikkas, due to their metaphysical Cartesianism assumption, requires both the private experience and the public aspect to be present for a meaningful discourse about epistemically private experience, what is another reason to discard their interpretation.¹

One of the best descriptions of what privacy really means is found in Kenny (1973). According to him, the claim that some sensations are private boils down to two further claims, namely that sensations are incommunicable (Nobody can know that I am in pain) and that sensations are inalienable (Nobody can feel my pain). Concerning the former, others can know that I am in pain, if they, e.g., see me crying or falling into a fire. But if we take the word "know" to mean the exclusion of all doubt, we have problems in formulating our claim. (cf. Kenny 1973, 185-6.) Or, as we find in the PI, Part II, 232: "I know...' may mean 'I do not doubt...' — but does not mean that the words 'I doubt . . .' are senseless, that doubt is logically excluded." (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], 102e) Sometimes people do not distinguish between incommunicability and inalienability, and this is the main problem here. Although there is no doubt that sensations are, for the most part, inalienable, it does not follow from this that they are incommunicable. (cf. Kenny 1973, 186.) It seems that this distinction is not present in the construal of these issues offered by the Hintikkas, which in turn distorts their interpretation of the pertinent issues.

Furthermore, as Gomm puts it (1988, 165):

"If one is not suspected of shamming, then one's behaviour (including linguistic behaviour) defines the quality of one's inner experiences. Sincere avowals, for example, express real experiences."

This is all there is to it and all we need. If we tried to seek some other way in which sensations can be thought of as 'really experienced', we would be turning "precisely the type of metaphysical cog that Wittgenstein tried to expose as playing no part in language—games", as Gomm puts it (1988, 165).

Robert Fogelin says that an interpretation such as the one offered by the Hintikkas could be made to work, but we would then require a detailed expla-

1 We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for spelling out this point.

nation of the procedure of relating the private to the public. In other words, such a procedure would have to be embedded inside a language game that is mastered by members of a community. This subsequently brings about the question of the procedure of mastering such a language game and we need a clear explanation of what training or correcting mistakes would be like in it. (cf. Fogelin 1989, 96)

Also, Pears (1994, 8) states that semantical and epistemic considerations cannot be separated when we talk about Wittgenstein's views on sensation language. He makes two points regarding this. Firstly, our natural response to somebody else's pain is "original and fundamental" (Pears 1994, 10). Namely, in usual circumstances, we do not contemplate the reaction we should give to somebody else's pain, and in doing philosophy, we forget this fact. Consequently, we proceed to portray another person's pain as a problematic object which ought to be but is not, accessible to scientific investigation. Secondly, when somebody feels pain, she does not identify a sensation, feel it as painful, and then report it as pain. Pain and its natural expression cannot be separated, the sufferer's relation to her pain is unlike and the observer's relation to an object she is trying to describe accurately. (cf. Pears 1994, 10) Also, according to Pears, Wittgenstein's argument that the independent private sensation type is an idle cog requires epistemic considerations if it is going to be argued through the inability to form a sensation language in a way that is independent from the public use. (cf. Pears 1994; 13)

We share Pears' view that semantic and epistemic considerations cannot be separated when talking about Wittgenstein's views on sensation language because these are a form of language games. Especially when we talk about normative language games, their use or misuse can also evoke inner emotions, which do not have the character of epistemic privacy but are our individual reactions to them.

Furthermore, when the Hintikkas talk about language games as the base for rule–following and communication, it seems that they are slightly off track. Namely, language games are, in the way Wittgenstein utilizes them, best understood as heuristic devices for describing our communicatory activity, they do not exist in reality in the strict sense of the word. Maybe it would be better if the Hintikkas had used the notion of forms of life instead of language games, as forms of life are those worldly events that language games aim to describe.

Final Words

It is undoubtful that the Hintikkas misconstrued some parts of Wittgenstein's philosophy, like their supposition of metaphysical Cartesianism to Wittgenstein or their construal of language games. Nonetheless, their interpretation

gives us a viable alternative to the received view on the issue related to epistemic privacy. As Kripke had already shown before them, the argumentation against epistemic privacy should not be seen as separated from the argumentation concerning rule–following, as both of them share a common foothold. Namely, both of them rely heavily on the public framework that is set up through forms of life expressed through language games containing practices that have been entrenched in a particular community.

The part that is especially worth mentioning is the Hintikkas' emphasis on Wittgenstein's critique of the model of *Bezeichnung*, as they call it, namely the critique of the idea that naming can occur directly and unmediated by a social context, i.e., outside of a language game. This offers us a novel exegesis of some parts of Wittgenstein's later philosophy and sheds some new light on already explored issues, like Wittgenstein's arguments versus epistemic privacy and his arguments related to rule–following.

We believe that the diverse discussion on the phenomena of epistemic privacy helps to shed light on the myriad ways in which our mental life interacts with the public language games in which we take part. This complex "activity of mind" permeates our actions, our speech and our understanding. Wittgenstein explains the relevance of "mental activity" in PI 547 using the example of denial, and negation:

"Denying: an 'activity of mind'. Deny something, and observe what you do! — Do you shake your head internally? And if it is so — is this process more worthy of our interest than that of writing a negation sign in a sentence? Do you now know the essence of negation?"

By this example of the analysis of the complex activity of the human mind (geistige Tätigkeit), it is plausible that the process of using and applying language games is inherently more complex when we have to take into account our mental states. This is especially visible in language games related to ethical and aesthetical forms of life, as we will need to affirm or suppress our inner feelings about certain issues to fully take part in the public, intersubjective forms of life.

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Sažetak

PRIVATNI JEZIK U *FILOZOFIJSKIM ISTRAŽIVANJIMA*: ODRŽIVOST INTERPRETACIJE HINTIKKĀ

JURE ZOVKO, MATE PENAVA

U ovom radu analiziramo tumačenje Wittgensteinovih argumenata protiv epistemičke privatnosti koje su ponudili Jaakko i Merrill Hintikka. Glavni naglasak rada je na istraživanju njihovih stajališta o ovom pitanju i ispitivanju veza između njihove argumentacije te one Saula Kripkea, kako bi se vidjelo u kojoj se mjeri ta stajališta podudaraju. Razlog za usporedbu navedenih autora je taj što se svi oni protive uvriježenom gledištu na argument protiv privatnog jezika, koje smatra da rasprava o privatnom jeziku počinje s paragrafom 243 Filozofijskih istraživanja. Zapravo Hintikke i Kripke tvrde da je Wittgenstein već raspravljao o pitanju nemogućnosti privatnog jezika u razmatranjima vezanim za slijeđenje pravila, a posebice u paragrafima 201 i 202 Filozofijskih istraživanja. Rad će nadalje istražiti neke nedostatke tumačenja Wittgensteinove filozofije koja su ponudili Hintikke i pokušati pružiti opću perspektivu održivosti njihove pozicije u odnosu na Wittgensteinov argument protiv epistemičke privatnosti.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Ludwig Wittgenstein, slijeđenje pravila, privatni jezik, intersubjektivnost, Saul Kripke, Hintikke

^{*} Profesor emeritus dr. sc. Jure Zovko, Sveučilište u Zadru, Odjel za filozofiju, Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV. br. 2, 23000 Zadar, Hrvatska. E–adresa: jzovko@unizd.hr ORCID iD: : https://orcid.org/0000–0002–2937–2612

^{**} Doc. dr. sc. Mate Penava, Sveučilište u Zadru, Odjel za filozofiju, Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV. br. 2, 23000 Zadar, Hrvatska. E–adresa: mpenava21@unizd.hr ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000–0003–4735–6533