In The Private Language Argument, Wittgenstein is arguing against the privacy, in principle, of the Cartesian mind. (“Only you can know, with certainty, the contents of your own thoughts. The rest of us must just guess, based upon what you do and say.”)

First, W shows how we name objects (or events) in a public language (in a “language game”).

Someone points at an object and names it (naming by ostension).
“humuhumu” --> that fish over there

Then, the next time we see a fish go by, we can, following a rule for the application of the name (its criterion of correctness), decide, say whether this fish is “humuhumu”.

Then W argues that this same series of events could not occur for a private language.
How do we name or recognize an inner sensation?

E.g. First you “inwardly point” at a twinge-like sensation and dub it “twinge”.

The next time an apparently twinge-like sensation occurs, you are faced with the question: Is this a twinge or isn’t it?

To answer the question you need some kind of criterion of correctness, a rule which tells you how to identify the sensation correctly.
But, says, Wittgenstein, every rule—every criterion of correctness—itself requires a rule (a criterion of correctness) to interpret it.

Thus a infinite regress occurs, of rules to interpret rules, to interpret rules, to interpret rules...
Unfortunately for Wittgenstein, we could turn the same argument back on him: doesn’t an infinite regress occur for naming all public objects as well?
E.g. Consider the old humuhumu problem again.

1. One you’ve decided to settle your dispute by applying the following rule with three steps: a) Get some pictures of the *%& fish, and b) determine the visual properties of a humuhumu; c) look and see whether this fish has those properties.

2. But now we need to apply these three rules, and each one requires its own criterion of correctness. We need to know:
   a) Exactly how do you go about finding some pictures?
   b) Exactly how do you determine which features are typical of the humuhumu?
   c) Exactly how do you compare the pictures to the fish?
So if Wittgenstein has shown that it is not possible to re-identify or name *private* sensations, using the same argument, we can show that it is not possible to name or re-identify *public* objects.
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So something is wrong with Wittgenstein’s argument.
This way of arguing is known as a “reductio ad absurdum”—you show that the argument as given leads to a clearly false conclusion.

Hence there must be something wrong with the argument strategy (i.e. some of the premises must be false)
When trying to understand an argument, and the argument clearly doesn’t work, it’s reasonable to ask whether you have understood the argument—in this case what Wittgenstein had in mind.

**A Good Rule of Thumb:** Famous philosophers are rarely stupid and usually they have something pretty interesting to say, even if their views are not very clearly expressed.
Two ways to interpret W.'s argument.

If you correctly apply the rule, then surely it is possible to incorrectly apply the rule? (Correct application vs. incorrect application.) A problem about rules.

OR

If you can correctly remember how to apply the name, then surely you can misremember how to apply the name. (Remembering how to apply the name vs. misremembering how to apply the name.) A problem about memory.
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How would I know if I misremembered my very first “twinge”, the one I used to establish the rule?

Let’s accept that we can use whatever standards we normally accept when naming an external object.

Example. Naming a colour sample “milk white”.
1. We get a paint chip.
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Milk White

2. We call this colour “milk white”.
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   Milk White

2. We call this colour “milk white”.

3. We put the paint chip away in a safe place.
4. I go over to my boyfriend’s house; I strongly suspect that his kitchen wall’s might be painted in “milk white”.

5. We pull out the paint chip and compare it to the walls.

6. We can see, clearly, whether the walls are painted in “milk white” or in some other colour.
1. I have a mental "paint chip" — i.e. a colour sensation:
1. I have a mental “paint chip” a colour sensation:

2. I dub it “milk white”.

“Milk White”
1. I have a mental “paint chip” a colour sensation:

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3. I put it away in a safe place in my memory.
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“Milk White”
1. I have a mental “paint chip” a colour sensation:

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3. I put it away in a safe place in my memory.

4. I go over to my boyfriend’s house and begin to suspect that his kitchen wall’s would look great painted in “milk white”.

5. I pull out my “milk white” sensation and imagine it on the walls.
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2. I dub it “milk white”.

3. I put it away in a safe place in my memory.

4. I go over to my boyfriend’s house and begin to suspect that his kitchen wall’s would look great painted in “milk white”.

5. I pull out my “milk white” sensation and imagine it on the walls.

6. I declare that the walls would look fantastic painted “that” colour.
Here is the problem:

Do you have any good reason to think that what you imagined as the colour sensation of “milk white” is the very same as the first sensation which you inwardly dubbed “milk white”?

More importantly… How would you ever know whether it did or not match? How do you know that the mental paint chip you “put away” bears any resemblance to the mental paint chip that you “took out” when you are standing in your boyfriend’s kitchen?

Worse.. How would you check that you had the “right” sensation?
The problem here is that there would seem to be no way to establish the sensation which you dubbed “milk white” is reliably retrieved when you “call up” that sensation.

There is no cupboard of the mind, one you can identify as the cupboard where you put that first sensation “chip” and to which you go back and take it out the next time you need to verify that you’ve got another “milk white” sensation. You can’t check on your memories in the same way that you can check on that physical paint chip which you put away in a physical cupboard (“oh right, the one second on the left on the top shelf”).
To put this another way, we seem to just take it on trust that the sensation remember is the very same sensation that we originally experienced.
Back to Behaviorism…

But if dualism leaves you with two difficult problems (The Problem of Other Minds and The Mind-Body Problem), is Behaviorism really any better?

Appiah’s First Problem with Behaviorism:

1. While Dualism must hold that all our thoughts are private, Behaviorism holds that all our thoughts are public. In other words, it is not possible to have a thought that is private in principle. Is really plausible that we have no secret thoughts? (Appiah says: … “there is something simply crazy about the publicness of the behaviorist (view of mind).”
To have a secret is itself a psychological state. It is a state such that under most circumstances you will be disposed to deny/behave as if you believe that $x$.

So yes, the Behaviorist thinks that it is possible for people to have "secret" beliefs but that does not mean there would be no behavioral dispositions associated with them.
To have a secret is itself a psychological state. It is state such that under most circumstances you will be disposed to deny/behave as if you believe that x.

So yes, the Behaviorist thinks that it is possible for people to have "secret" beliefs but that does not mean there would be no behavioral dispositions associated with them.

E.g. Suppose that Queen Elizabeth were personally responsible for sabotaging Diana and Dodi’s driver, by plying him with alcohol. How would she behave given this horrible secret?
What the behaviorist is saying is this…

If there are no conceivable circumstances under which a person would show behavior appropriate to the belief that x, then there would be no reason think that that person does have the belief that x.
Appiah’s Second Problem with Behaviorism

1. According to behaviorists, thoughts are dispositions to behave.

2. For certain sorts of thoughts, one way that we humans behave is to talk about them. E.g. “I have a headache.”

3. It follows that animals/humans without speech cannot have certain thoughts—those we would express in language.
Is this really such a problem?

1) Aren’t there some beliefs that we wouldn’t want to attribute to creatures without a language?

   For example, consider Helen Keller. Before she had any language, it was quite impossible for her to understand some pretty basic facts about life around her—e.g. that her second cousin’s Easter dress had been left on the picnic site at Bar Harbour, Maine in 1917.

   And this isn’t just being mean to Hellen Keller, not to mention small furry creatures of the infinitely cute persuasion.

   Some concepts seem to require language in order to convey them.
2. Although each belief will be defined in terms of dispositions to behave, each belief will involve complex dispositions involving many conditions.

Clearly, some humans will lack parts of the dispositions even though they clearly have the beliefs.

E.g. A blind man will not examine a map visually even though he is in the psychological state of “trying very hard to find his way from Vancouver to Philadelphia”.

Surely it is not a huge criticism of behaviorism to say that not every part of the disposition must be fulfilled if the subject lacks capacities that people usually have.
ASSIGNMENT #1 Due Monday, Sept. 22nd by time of lecture.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SENT ELECTRONICALLY TO YOUR TA: PLEASE GO TO THE WEBSITE FOR INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DO THIS.

In class, we have been discussing Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument. This argument is designed to show that Descartes’ view of the mind (and its contents) as private in principle could not possibly be true.

In Appiah’s text, *Thinking it Through*, Wittgenstein’s argument is presented as an argument about rules, the rules for applying names to sensations in a consistent way (so that the name denotes or picks out the same sensation every time). On Appiah’s interpretation, the argument hinges upon how we are to interpret these rules for naming—that we would need rules to interpret each criterion of correctness, and hence rules to interpret those rules and so on ad infinitum. The problem with this interpretation is that the very same argument applies to naming and re-identifying external objects as well, objects such as fish, trees or the latest Mercedes G-class SUV.
In class, however, we discussed an alternative interpretation of Wittgenstein’s argument. On this interpretation, Wittgenstein is questioning how it is possible to re-identify our sensations, and he is arguing that there is a significant difference between naming/re-identifying public and private objects.

To the best of your ability, try to reconstruct this argument from the lectures (you may use the Powerpoint lecture notes on the website). In the first part of the assignment, construct numbered premises leading to a conclusion. In the second part of the assignment, use your formal argument to re-write the argument in full sentence, paragraph form, adding in justifications or clarifications as you go along. In this second half of the assignment, try to write as clearly as possible, for the intelligent audience who is unfamiliar with Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument.

Length: No longer than 2 pages; no shorter than 1 page. 12 point font. 1 inch margins.