

Wittgenstein on intentionality and mental representation

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explain some of Wittgenstein's remarks about intentionality in his later philosophy, in particular the claim that 'it is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact' (*Philosophical Investigations* §445). P.M.S. Hacker has claimed that these remarks provide the basis for a 'resolution of the problems and puzzles of intentionality'. I argue that they do not, and although provocative and suggestive, Wittgenstein's 'grammatical' remarks provide no solution whatsoever to the problems of intentionality, even in their own terms. I conclude that if we want to understand intentionality, a 'grammatical' investigation in Wittgenstein's sense will not help us, and we should look instead for inspiration to those philosophers who have given substantive phenomenological analyses of mental representation.

1. Introduction

The concept of intentionality – what Brentano called 'the mind's direction on its objects' – has been a preoccupation of many of the most significant twentieth century philosophers. Some, like Husserl, have developed substantive theories of intentionality, in an attempt to reveal the structure of intentional acts and states. Others, most famously Ludwig Wittgenstein, have attempted to 'dissolve' the apparent problems of intentionality by showing how these problems arise from being misled by certain ways of talking about the mind.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the place of the concept of intentionality in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and to criticize a central aspect of his treatment of intentionality: the idea that the problems of intentionality can be dissolved with what he calls a 'grammatical investigation'. I will argue that Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation of intentionality in the *Philosophical Investigations* fails to answer the questions that it sets itself. It fails, even in its own terms, to dissolve the problems of intentionality.

Kevin Mulligan has written illuminatingly about both Husserl's theories of intentionality and about Wittgenstein's treatment of this and related phenomena (meaning, naming describing, internal and external relations). He has also produced important comparative studies of Wittgenstein and some of his Austrian contemporaries and predecessors (see, e.g. Mulligan 1993 and 1997). I hope, then, that it is a fitting tribute to Kevin on this occasion to offer this critical discussion of Wittgenstein's treatment of intentionality. Moreover, I hope that the conclusion of this paper – that we need a substantive, not a 'grammatical' conception of intentionality – will encourage students of intentionality to return to the insights of the phenomenological philosophers which Kevin has done so much to make available to us.

2. Intentionality and grammar

Although the word 'intentionality' is not (to my knowledge) used in Wittgenstein's philosophical writings, the idea it expresses was central at all stages of his philosophical development. This should be obvious on a little reflection, not least because the philosophical notion of intentionality is closely related to the notion of meaning, and questions about meaning are, of course, central to both the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work.¹ A full treatment of Wittgenstein's views on meaning is not a task for a single essay. Instead, what I want to do here is to narrow the focus and discuss some specific claims in Wittgenstein's middle and later work about the role of the notion of grammar in his attempts to solve (or dissolve) some quite specific problems of intentionality. In particular, I want to restrict myself to the discussion his

¹ P.M.S. Hacker has claimed that the topic of intentionality is central to Wittgenstein's critique of the *Tractatus*: 'Wittgenstein's detailed criticism of the picture theory was conducted by way of an investigation of intentionality' (1996:79).

later remarks about the relationship between expectation and fulfillment, and the parallels with the relationship between an order and its execution, and with the relationship between a proposition and what makes it true.

These relationships all exhibit what Wittgenstein once called ‘the harmony between thought and reality’. I shall follow him in talking about the *relationship* between thought and reality, and of the problem of intentionality as the problem of this relationship. But this talk should not be taken too literally – as we shall see, the later Wittgenstein did not think that intentionality really was a relationship between thought and reality.² But I will use this term as a convenient label for the particular aspect of the problem of intentionality which interests Wittgenstein. Other problems lie in the vicinity: for instance, the problem of how a physical object can come to think about anything in the world; or of how thinking can in general be a relation if it is possible to think about that which does not exist. These problems are, I believe, all related; but here I will not have much to say about them here.

A central commitment of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is that philosophical problems (like the problems of intentionality) do not arise because of our ignorance of the metaphysical structure of the world, or of facts about our minds. So we will not solve the problems by making discoveries about the world or our minds. ‘Problems are solved’ he writes ‘not by reporting new experience, but by arranging what we have always known’ (PI §109). I will therefore take seriously and literally his remarks about the nature of philosophy (PI §§100 -132ff) and in particular, his insistence that the aim of philosophy is not to construct theories which explain the phenomena. Rather, what we should be trying to do is to give a ‘perspicuous representation’ of the phenomena themselves, in order to ‘command a clear view of the use of our words’

² I agree with him, for independent reasons: see Crane 2001: §7

(PI §122). We do this, among other things, by ‘giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook’ (PI §132). This is what Wittgenstein calls a ‘grammatical investigation’.

As Marie McGinn has persuasively argued, the concept of a grammatical investigation is ‘the key to understanding Wittgenstein’s [later] work’ (McGinn 1997: 13). But what exactly did Wittgenstein mean by ‘grammatical’ and ‘grammar’? Despite G.E.M. Anscombe’s claim that what he had in mind here was grammar in the sense of syntax and morphology (Anscombe 1983), it is clear from his actual discussions in the *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere that he used the term much more broadly. Grammatical observations are normally remarks about the meaning of words – they are often what others might call partial definitions or conceptual or analytic truths – and no remarks about syntax or morphology could possibly have the consequences which his grammatical remarks do. Someone who denies that ‘one plays patience by oneself’ (PI §248) is not breaking any rules of syntax – the sentence ‘One does not play patience by oneself’ is perfectly well-formed. Rather, someone who says has not grasped what patience is, or what ‘patience’ means, or the concept of patience, or (as Wittgenstein might prefer to say) the way the word is *used*. Wittgenstein’s later investigations, then, are concerned with what McGinn calls the ‘distinctive patterns of use that constitute what Wittgenstein calls the “grammar of our concepts”’ (McGinn 1997: 14).

So it is, I claim, with Wittgenstein’s treatment of intentionality. Wittgenstein’s attempted solutions to the problem of the relationship between thought and reality in his later philosophy appeal to the idea of grammar and grammatical remarks. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had attempted to answer the question of the relationship between thought and reality with his picture theory of the proposition: the proposition

and what it represents are related by what he called an ‘internal relation’. This metaphysical account of the relationship between thought and reality was then replaced by a ‘grammatical’ account in the middle period and later philosophy. Thought and reality are not related by some substantial metaphysical relation like ‘picturing’; rather, the relation (if it is one at all) is merely grammatical. In order to explain this contrast and its significance, we need to look briefly at the account of representation in the *Tractatus*.

3. Intentionality in the *Tractatus*

One of the central and most famous claims of the *Tractatus* is that a proposition is a picture of reality. This ‘picture theory’ is an attempt to explain how linguistic representation, and therefore truth and falsehood, are possible. The fundamental unit of representation is the proposition, which represents a possible fact. The idea of the picture theory is that, contrary to appearances, the proposition shares a kind of structure with the fact it represents:

At the first glance the proposition -- say as it stands printed on paper -- does not seem to be a picture of the reality of which it treats. But nor does the musical score appear at first sight to be a picture of a musical piece; nor does our phonetic spelling (letters) seem to be a picture of our spoken language. And yet these symbolisms prove to be pictures -- even in the ordinary sense of the word -- of what they represent. (TLP 4.011)

Just as a picture represents by parts of the picture being related in something like the way the parts of what is represented are, so all these different forms of symbolism relate to what they represent by sharing what Wittgenstein calls ‘structure’: ‘to all of them the logical structure is common’ (TLP 4.014). This is why he says that they are all pictures.

The proposition and the fact are related to one another by the picturing relation. But this relation is supposed to be ‘internal’ to the relata:

The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that *pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world*. (TLP 4.014, my emphasis)

Wittgenstein initially defines ‘internal’ in this way for properties: ‘a property is internal if it is unthinkable that its object does not possess it’ (TLP 4.123). But it is clear that the idea applies to relations too, as Wittgenstein goes on to illustrate with his example of one shade of colour being darker than another: ‘this bright blue colour and that stand in the internal relation of bright and darker *eo ipso*. It is unthinkable that these two objects should not stand in this relation’ (TLP 4.123). So we might say that an internal relation is one which is essential to its relata (see Beaney 2006: 45).

Wittgenstein’s use of the phrase ‘internal relation’ is somewhat different from the way the phrase is used these days. Today’s terminology has it that a relation is internal when it supervenes on intrinsic properties of the relata, and external when it does not. (Spatial or causal relations are paradigm examples of external relations.) This allows us to distinguish between internal relations which are essential to their relata and those which are not. For example, I might stand in the internal relation of being taller than my brother, because this relation supervenes on our intrinsic heights: given our heights, we could not fail to stand in this relation. But our standing in this relation is not essential to me nor to my brother. There may, however, be relations I stand in which are essential to me. For example, if Kripke (1980) is correct, the fact that I have the parents I do is a relational fact which is essential to me. But not all internal relations, in the contemporary sense, are essential to their relata, and therefore the contemporary sense is not Wittgenstein’s.

The contemporary use of the term ‘internal relation’ enables us to make a distinction which Wittgenstein’s does not. Nonetheless, our concern here is with Wittgenstein and not with contemporary metaphysics. What Wittgenstein meant by saying that a thought and reality are internally related – in the sense defined in the *Tractatus* – is this: if the thought that *p* is internally related to the fact that *p*, it is unthinkable that the thought and the fact do not stand in that relation. Standing in that relation is, in other words, essential to the thought and the fact.

The essence of the picture theory, then, is that the proposition (or thought) and reality are related internally. P.M.S. Hacker has called this the ‘fundamental insight’ of the *Tractatus*:

thought and proposition alike are *internally related* to the state of affairs that makes them true. The thought that *p* is the very thought that is made true by the existence of the state of affairs that *p*, and so too, the proposition that *p* is the very proposition that is made true by the existence of the state of affairs that *p*. What one thinks, when one thinks that *p*, is precisely the case if one’s thought is true. In this sense one’s thought reaches right up to reality, for what one thinks is *that things are thus-and-so*, not something else – for example, a proposition or a Fregean *Gedanke*, which stands in some obscure relation to how things are. (Hacker 1996: 31)

Hacker argues that Wittgenstein’s predecessors failed to see that thought and reality were internally related, and that therefore they had to postulate something ‘between’ the thought and the reality, like an idea or a Fregean sense. But Hacker adds something to Wittgenstein’s idea by saying that what one thinks (the thought) *is* what is the case if one’s thought is true. In other words, the true thought is identical to the fact: this is how thought ‘reaches right up to reality’.³ This is not implied by Wittgenstein’s claim that thought and fact are internally related, since internally related items can be non-identical (as the colours are in Wittgenstein’s example).

³ For a similar suggestion about how to understand thought ‘reaching right up to reality’ see Ammereller 2001: 60.

Somewhat perversely, Hacker sees it as an *advantage* of this view that it makes it possible to ‘re-formulate’ the Platonic puzzles of non-being and falsehood: if what one thinks is identical to what is the case if the thought is true, then how can one ever think something false? However, since false thoughts plainly are possible, it is surely better to have a conception of thought and reality that does not raise this problem at all. Such a conception should reject, at a minimum, the identification of the true thought with the fact.

Of course, ‘fact’ can mean a number of different things. In one usage, a fact is just a truth – a fact is ‘a thought [*Gedanke*] which is true’ as Frege puts it (1988: 35). On another usage, a fact is something in the world, something on an ontological level with objects and properties (McTaggart 1921), something that makes truths true. As his dismissal of propositions and Fregean *Gedanken* indicates, Hacker’s use of ‘state of affairs’ corresponds to this second use of fact. Hence the Platonic problem: how is falsity possible?

We might be tempted to think that the Platonic problem would arise even if we reject Hacker’s identification of the true thought with the fact. For if it is unthinkable that the true thought should not stand in a relation to its fact, and if only existing things can stand in relations, then it looks as if any true proposition is essentially true. As Michael Beaney puts it, ‘the relation a picture has to what it depicts, in virtue of [their] shared form, is an internal relation. Without such a relation, a picture could not be the picture it is’ (Beaney 2006: 45). So the picture could not be the picture it is – it could not picture what it does – unless it shared a form with the fact. But if there is no fact, then there is nothing to share. No fact, no shared form; no shared form, no picturing; no picturing, no proposition.

One way around this is to talk of propositions sharing their form with *possible* states of affairs rather than actual facts (e.g. TLP 4.124). If we say this, though, then we have to give up Hacker's interpretation that a true proposition is a fact. For any contingent proposition, it is what it is (it says what it says) regardless of whether it is true. So its saying what it says cannot consist in its being identical to an *actual* fact. Maybe the true propositions of the *Tractatus* reach 'right out to reality' in some other way; but it had better not be by being identical to actual facts.

Despite the complexities of some of the *Tractatus*'s doctrines, some things are clear even after this brief discussion. There is not much philosophy of mind (in the contemporary sense) in the *Tractatus*, but there is a theory of representation. So insofar as the *Tractatus* has anything to say about intentionality at all, it lies in its treatment of representation. The *Tractatus*'s theory of representation is the theory of the proposition. And the theory of the proposition is the picture theory: the proposition and what it represents stand in an internal relation of picturing. An internal relation is one which is essential to its relata: the relata could not both exist and fail to stand in that relation. To accommodate falsehood, we should say that contingent propositions stand in this internal relations to possible states of affairs.

4. Intentionality in the middle period

In abandoning the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein abandoned the idea that thought and reality stand in an internal relation, and in fact the term does not seem to appear in his later writings.⁴ In his so-called middle period of the 1930s, the notion of an internal relation seems to be replaced in places with the notion of a 'grammatical relation' (see Moore 1954). Nonetheless, the concern with the relationship between

⁴ A few exceptions: PI part II: p. 212; and RFM: 363-4.

thought and reality remained at the centre of Wittgenstein's pre-occupations. And according to Hacker, 'the insight into the internal relations between thought, language and reality ... is no less pivotal for Wittgenstein's later treatment of the problems of intentionality than it was for the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*' (Hacker 1996: 32). In section 4, I shall examine this claim of Hacker's.

The source of some of the later claims in the *Philosophical Investigations* about thought and reality lies in the collection of remarks that came to be published as *Philosophical Grammar* in 1974. Here we find Wittgenstein comparing the relation between an order and its execution, and between a proposition and a fact:

Suppose someone says that one can infer from an order the action that obeys it, and from a proposition the fact that verifies it. What on earth can one verify from a proposition apart from *itself*? How can one pull the action out of the order before it even takes place? (PG: 159)

The puzzle here is how the action specified by an order can be, so to speak, 'contained' within the order before that action takes place (so it can be 'pulled out' of it); and there is supposed to be a parallel puzzle about how the fact that verifies the proposition can be 'pulled out' of the proposition itself.

The worry here is clearly about the possibility of representation. How can one thing (an action) represent another (an action) if the second thing is not literally contained within the first? This way of putting the puzzle, though, is not especially compelling. For why should we be tempted to think that one thing can only represent another if what is represented is contained within it? If there is a temptation here, it seems to me, it must derive from the idea that something cannot represent something unless it is related to it – an idea that Wittgenstein embraced in the *Tractatus*, as we saw. And yet, an order can represent the action which would fulfil it without that action ever happening – so its representation of the action cannot be a relation to it.

This reading certainly makes sense of Wittgenstein's concern with the problem of the relationship between thought and reality, which he sees exemplified in the *Philosophical Grammar's* remarks in the 'relationship' between orders and their executions, expectation or a wish and its fulfillment, and propositions and what makes them true. In each case we are puzzled because we think that the 'thought' (expectation, wish, order, proposition etc.) must be related to what it represents, but representation can occur without any such relation.

Insofar as Wittgenstein offers a solution to this problem at this stage in his philosophy, it occurs in the following passage:

"The proposition determines in advance what will make it true." Certainly, the proposition ' p ' determines that p must be the case in order to make it true; and that means:
(the proposition p) = (the proposition that the fact p makes true)
And the statement that the wish for it to be the case that p is satisfied by the event p , merely enunciates a rule for signs:
(the wish for it to be the case that p) = (the wish that is satisfied by the event p)
Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language. (PG 161-2; see also *Zettel* 55)

Wittgenstein here denies that there is any kind of 'metaphysical' relation between 'thought' (expectation, wish, order, proposition etc.) and 'reality' (fulfillment, action, fact etc.). What there is rather is a 'rule for signs', or a grammatical rule: if your expectation or wish is an expectation or wish that p , then it will be fulfilled by the fact that p ; if a proposition is a proposition that p , then it will be made true by the fact that p . And these 'grammatical' truths about expectation and the like – i.e. that they are distinguished and specified in terms of what we now call a 'content-clause' – are all that the harmony between thought and reality consists in.

5. Intentionality in the *Philosophical Investigations*

The *Philosophical Grammar* was assembled by Wittgenstein's executors a while after his death, and parts of it are earlier drafts of passages which were incorporated into the *Philosophical Investigations*. So unsurprisingly, there is a more extended discussion in the later work of the problem of the relationship of thought and reality which was discussed in the earlier work. However, the discussion of the problem in the *Philosophical Investigations* is more circumspect, qualified and less easy to summarize than the discussion in the middle period work.

I will concentrate on §§428 to 465 of the *Investigations*, where we find some of Wittgenstein's most famous remarks about intentionality:

How was it possible for thought to deal with the very object *itself*? We feel as if by means of it we had caught reality in its net. (§428)

Every sign by itself seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life? (§432)

A wish seems already to know what will or would satisfy it; a proposition, a thought, what makes it true—even the thing is not there at all! Whence this *determining* of what is not yet there? This despotic demand? (§437)

I can look for him when he is not there, but not hang him when he is not there. One might want to say: "But he must be somewhere there if I am looking for him"—Then he must be somewhere there too if I don't find him and even if he doesn't exist at all. (§462)

In these passages Wittgenstein gives his most concise, vivid and forceful expression to some of the traditional philosophical concerns about intentionality: how thought can concern the world outside the mind, particular real things, not just representations of them ('the very object *itself*'); how signs, which are in themselves intrinsically meaningless, can come to have significance ('every sign *by itself* seems dead'); how wishes and thoughts specify what would satisfy them ('whence this *determining* of what is not yet there?'); and how one can think about people or things which are not there ('I can look for him if he is not there, but not hang him if he is not there').

If we take the underlying worry to be the one described in the previous section – as being about relationality – then we can see how the concerns in some of these quotations are all connected. For example, one might be tempted to think that for thought to catch reality in its net, objects of thought have to be actually related to the thought; but how is this possible given that I can think about someone who doesn't exist (§462). Similarly, wishes and propositions seem to 'determine' what fulfills them, or makes them true, and this determining looks like a relation; but how can there be such a thing, if the fulfillment has not yet occurred (§437)?

I am not saying that Wittgenstein is proposing that these problems only have one source; only that it might be useful for us to see their source in this way. In fact, it seems to me that Wittgenstein would not identify one source to these problems. But nonetheless a general line is suggested in these passages (§§428-65): Wittgenstein is attempting to use various kinds of grammatical investigation in order to dissolve these problems of intentionality.

Let us see how he applies his grammatical method in his treatment of the main examples of these passages: the relationship between expectation and fulfillment, and that between wishes and their satisfaction. We can begin with expectation. Any expectation is the expectation of something (§438). So it seems that there is your expectation, and what you expect, and these are different things. But how, then, is your expectation related to what you expect?

One mistaken picture Wittgenstein wants to undermine is that what you expect must in some mysterious way already be contained in your expectation:

I see someone pointing a gun and say "I expect a bang". The shot is fired.— Well, that was what you expected; so did that bang somehow already exist in your expectation? (§442)

-- to which the answer is obviously, no. The other mistaken picture he wants to undermine is the idea that the expectation and what satisfies it can be connected by a mental action of 'meaning' something: 'hocus pocus in the soul'. Taken at face value, there is no future in either of these suggestions. (After all, who in their right mind would want to defend hocus pocus? Or the soul, for that matter? Or mysterious immaterial bangs contained in our expectations?)

An alternative suggestion is then aired, that 'there is some other kind of agreement between your expectation and what occurred'. But what other kind of agreement? Wittgenstein is at pains to emphasise that what satisfies your expectation is the event itself (in this example, the bang itself). The satisfaction of the expectation is not given by a feeling, to which the bang is something additional. So this is the question: there is your expectation (of a bang), there is what satisfies it (a bang) and there is 'agreement' between them when the latter occurs; but what is this agreement?

In §444 he begins to give his answer to this question, by describing an actual situation in which we might talk of expecting something:

But it might now be asked: what's it like for him to come?—The door opens, someone walks in, and so on.—What's it like for me to expect him to come?—I walk up and down the room, look at the clock now and then, and so on.—But the one set of events has not the smallest similarity to the other! So how can one use the same words in describing them?—But perhaps I say as I walk up and down: "I expect he'll come in"—Now there is a similarity somewhere. But of what kind?! (§444)

The similarity Wittgenstein is pointing to here is simply that the words 'I expect he'll come in' can be used as an expression of the expectation, *and* by containing the sentence 'he'll come in', they contain a description of what fulfils the expectation.

It seems clear that the next remark (§445) is intended to sum up the preceding discussion: 'It is in language that an expectation and its fulfillment make contact'. In

this famous and puzzling remark, Wittgenstein implies that there is no need to think in terms of any kind of relationship (or nexus) between expectation and some extra-linguistic reality in order to give an account of the intentionality of expectation. We find the ‘contact’ between expectation and fulfillment in the fact that we use the same words (‘he’ll come in’) as an expression of what we expect, and as a description of what fulfills it. If we look at how we actually use the language of expectation (the grammar of ‘expect’), then our puzzlement should be dispelled.

The agreement or similarity between the expectation and what fulfills it is not a matter of some relationship between a state of mind and some not-yet-realised mysterious entity; nor is it (as in the *Tractatus*) an internal relation (‘picturing’, maybe) between the proposition describing the expectation and the event that fulfills it. Rather, the agreement simply consists in the grammatical fact that we use the same sentence ‘p’ in the description of the expectation that *p* as we do in the description of what is expected: *p*.

In §458 Wittgenstein explicitly applies this idea to orders and their executions:

“An order orders its own execution.” So it knows its execution, then, even before it is there?—But that was a grammatical proposition and it means: If an order runs “Do such-and-such” then executing the order is called “doing such-and-such”. (§458)

The proposition ‘An order orders its own execution’ is a grammatical proposition: that is, it specifies the regularities for using the terms ‘order’ and ‘execution’. It does not specify a relationship (‘ordering’) between one event (‘the order’) and another (‘its execution’). Someone who did not grasp that an order orders its own execution would not know how to use the word ‘order’ or ‘the execution of an order’.

These passages in the *Philosophical Investigations* seem to be a development of the *Philosophical Grammar*’s claim that ‘the harmony between thought and reality

is to be found in the grammar of the language' (PG 162). There Wittgenstein argued that to say that 'the wish for it to be the case that p is satisfied by the event p , merely enunciates a rule for signs'. The example of a 'rule for signs' he gave there was: '(the wish for it to be the case that p) = (the wish that is satisfied by the event p)'. In Hacker's words 'these are simply alternative specifications' of the wish (1996:79).

What is true of wishes and expectations, it seems, can be applied to the other examples of the relation between thought and reality: the thought and what makes it true, and the order and its execution, for example. In all these cases we might be tempted to think that there is some kind of special metaphysical relationship between the state of mind and its object, just as the *Tractatus* had postulated an internal relation between the proposition and the fact it represents. The later Wittgenstein's approach to this problem is to declare these 'relations' to be merely reflections of grammatical propositions, in the sense described above.

Generalising from the examples of expectation, wishing, and ordering, we can say that Wittgenstein's account of intentionality is based on the rejection of *any* metaphysical relationship between thoughts and the world. To say that the belief that snow is white is made true by the fact that snow is white is not to relate one thing (the belief) to another (the fact) by a relation ('truth-making'). Rather it is simply to specify how to use the expression, 'the belief that snow is white'. The expression is to be used in the same way as the expression 'the belief that is made true by the fact that snow is white'. This is as much a grammatical observation as is the observation that 'an order orders its own execution'.

P.M.S. Hacker, and some of those influenced by him, tend to see a deep continuity between the *Tractatus*'s idea of an internal relation, the *Philosophical Grammar*'s idea of a grammatical relation, and the *Investigations*'s idea of the contact

between expectation and its fulfillment being made ‘in language’.⁵ Hacker argues that the *Philosophical Grammar*’s point is that what the *Tractatus* took to be an internal relation between these things is ‘merely the shadow of a grammatical relation between expressions’ (1996:79). And he goes on to argue that this is the *Investigations*’s position too: the expectation that it will be the case that *p* simply is the expectation that is satisfied by its being the case that *p*: ‘these are simply alternative specifications of that expectation’ (1996:79).

According to Hacker, from the *Philosophical Investigations* onwards, ‘what gives “life” to language is its use in the practices of living beings’ (Hacker 1996:129). On this view, the point of Wittgenstein’s writings on intentionality is to undermine the idea that there is an ‘extra-linguistic nexus’ (1996:129) between a proposition and the fact that makes it true. The *Tractatus* had said that these relations are *internal*, but postulated a metaphysical structure to account for them. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein ‘now elucidates the intentionality of thought and language in intra-linguistic terms. Expectation and its fulfillment make contact *in language*, in the grammatical relation between the expressions “the expectation that *p*” and “the expectation that is fulfilled by the event that *p*”’ (1996:129). This is what Hacker calls Wittgenstein’s ‘resolution of the problems and puzzles of intentionality’ (1996:129).⁶

⁵ Hacker (2001) writes: ‘The truth is that there is an internal relation between thought and fact (or state of affairs that obtains), and that the intrinsic individuation of thought and fact alike employs the same form of words “that *p*”. But this is not a matter of two objects matching each other, like a piston and cylinder, for the indisputable internal relation is forged within language, not between language and reality — by the grammatical equivalence of the phrases “the thought that *p*” and “the thought that is made true by the fact that *p*”, which are two different ways of characterizing one and the same thought.’ For similar claims, see Glock 1996 and Ammereller 2001.

⁶ Hacker elsewhere talks of the investigation of intentionality in the text known as the ‘Big Typescript’ which ‘demystified “the harmony between thought and reality” which lay at the heart of the *Tractatus*’ (1996: 86).

In the rest of this essay I will examine whether the discussion in the *Philosophical Investigations* does provide, as Hacker claims, a generally satisfactory resolution of the puzzles Wittgenstein has uncovered.

6. Evaluation

How satisfactory is this proposed solution to the problem of the relation between thought and reality? The idea that meaning might be explained by intra-linguistic regularities of use is an idea that has had some currency in recent philosophy of language. Philosophers who put emphasis on ‘use’ in explaining meaning often claim to have inspiration from Wittgenstein (see Horwich 1998) or from Sellars (Brandom 1998; cf Sellars 2007). But what we have to evaluate here is not whether one or another doctrine of ‘meaning as use’, or some related ‘inferentialist’ conception of intentionality, is correct. What we have to evaluate is whether Wittgenstein’s specific proposals, as just described, give effective solutions to the problems of intentionality as he construes them.

It is tempting to say: how can the relationship between thought and fact be an ‘intra-linguistic matter’? After all, the thought is one thing, the fact quite another! The thought that *Magellan’s voyage of 1519-1522 was the first successful circumnavigation of the globe* is something which is true, something which people can think, deny or doubt. It might have been false. The *fact* that the voyage was the first circumnavigation of the globe is something else altogether: the fact is not something one can think or doubt or deny. The fact is not true; the fact is something that took place, something which involved other facts, like the fact that Ferdinand Magellan sailed through the Magellan straits, that he was killed in the Philippines; these facts were all part of what happened in this voyage. These facts are things that

went on in the world; they are what is described by, or conceived of in, the thought. They are not the same kind of thing as the thought.

I do not think, however, that Wittgenstein is denying that there is a sense of 'fact' in which all these things are true of facts: the facts are in the world, and that the thought describes the facts. What he is attempting to reject is a certain *picture* of how thought and fact are connected: the picture that gives rise to our feeling that what is represented must in some sense be 'already contained' in the thought (§442), or that representation can only be achieved by some kind of 'hocus pocus in the soul'. His rejection of these pictures goes on to involve a diagnosis of how they arise from the ways in which we talk about fact and thought. His idea is that we are misled by the way we talk into thinking that things *must* be the way they are pictured in these misleading pictures. He clearly does not mean that there is no distinction between how things are and the way we talk about them; that would be absurd.

Wittgenstein is surely right to reject the idea that what is represented is in any sense 'already contained' within the thought; and he is right to reject the idea that representation is achieved by 'hocus pocus' in the soul (that is, by some mysterious process stipulated *ad hoc* solely for the purpose of explaining intentionality). But his own account of the problem goes further: he claims that there is *no* relation between thought and reality. Rather, there are grammatical relations between sentences describing thoughts (desires, expectations etc.) and sentences describing what would make them true (satisfy them, fulfill them etc.). Can this be the entire account of how intentionality works? Is the only thing we have to say about the relationship between the thought that *p* and the fact that makes it true that we have a 'grammatical' rule of signs linking expressions? Can this approach dissolve our deep sense of confusion and puzzlement about intentionality?

To begin to answer these questions, let's return to the case of expectation. Wittgenstein's idea is that to resolve our puzzlement, all we need to say about the link between expectation and its fulfillment is that a phrase of the form 'the expectation that p ' can be used interchangeably with a phrase of the form 'the expectation that is fulfilled by the fact that p '. This is simply because of the grammatical fact that (to modify §458) if an expectation is called 'an expectation of such-and-such' then what fulfills this expectation is called 'such-and-such'.

However, it appears that this is *not* all one can say about the relationship between an expectation and its fulfillment; and what more can be said does not obviously seem to be a matter of grammar at all, even in Wittgenstein's extended (and undeniably eccentric) use of that term. I will illustrate this with a simple example.

Consider my expectation that the postman will bring my mail in the morning. This expectation is the expectation that it is, according to Wittgenstein, because it is the expectation that is fulfilled by the event of the postman bringing my mail. Let's suppose that, unknown to me, there are two postmen in my neighbourhood: Mr Jones and Mr Smith. On Monday Mr Jones brings my mail, on Tuesday Mr Smith does. On Monday, then, my expectation is fulfilled by Mr Jones bringing my mail, so the following seems to be true on Monday:

- (1) My expectation that the postman brings my mail is the expectation that is fulfilled by Mr Jones's bringing my mail.

Whereas the following is true on Tuesday:

- (2) My expectation that the postman bring my mail is the expectation that is fulfilled by Mr Smith's bringing my mail.

And yet, on Monday and Tuesday, it is equally true that:

(3) My expectation that the postman bring my mail is the expectation that is fulfilled by the postman's bringing my mail.

It's just that different things count as *the postman's bringing my mail*, on Monday and Tuesday. So different things can fulfill the same expectation. In other words, the expectation that p can be the expectation that is fulfilled by the fact that q , where q and p are not the same fact.⁷ This can be an informative thing to say about what fulfills my expectation. In fact, on reflection, we can see that it is almost commonplace that we can describe the facts which would fulfill the expectation that p in many ways; we do not, and we are not obliged to, restrict ourselves to describing it as 'the fact that p '.

It is a consequence of this that your expectation can be fulfilled by an event e even if, in a certain sense, you did not expect e to happen. What this means is that e might have properties which you did not expect it to have. Suppose that Mr Smith is the local parson, but unknown to you he works as a postman to supplement his income. You are surprised to discover the parson in your yard on Tuesday with a mailbag. Yet this event, the event of the parson delivering your mail, is what fulfills your expectation that the postman deliver your mail. An expectation, it seems, can be fulfilled even if it is fulfilled in ways you do not expect.

What this shows is that you can describe what actually fulfills your expectation – what I shall call the *object* of the expectation – in a way that is independent of the description of the expectation itself. Wittgenstein's point, by

⁷ I have changed Wittgenstein's 'event that p ' to the more grammatically felicitous 'fact that p '; this changes nothing of any substance. Of course, the arrival of the postman is an event, but we can also talk of the fact that the postman arrived. We can talk in either way, since if any event e occurs, then it is a fact that e occurred. So we can either say that the event e satisfied the expectation, or that the expectation was satisfied by the fact that e occurred. This should be taken for granted in the discussion that follows.

contrast, is that you can only describe the object of the expectation in the way it is specified in the description of the expectation itself. Yet this does not seem to be true: you did not expect Mr Smith the parson to deliver your mail, yet this is what fulfills your expectation that the postman deliver your mail.

In her famous paper on the intentionality of sensation, G.E.M. Anscombe (1965) argued that when one gives what she calls the ‘intentional object’ of an intentional verb, one has to give the object ‘under a description’ – the description which the subject would recognize as characterizing the object of their thought, desire and so on. This is true, of course, if our aim is to describe how subjects themselves are thinking of, or conceptualizing, the object of their state of mind – what it is they want, what they expect, what they fear and so on. But if our aim is to truly describe what it is that fulfills the expectation, then it is not true that we always are obliged to describe the object of the expectation in a way that the subject would recognize. What satisfies the expectation is an event, and not an ‘event under a description’. For there are no events ‘under descriptions’, there are only events and descriptions of events; and descriptions of events do not fulfill expectations.

This suggests that we should distinguish, then, between what fulfills the expectation – the object of expectation – and how subjects themselves think of this object. If we call how the subject thinks of the object ‘*what is expected*’ then we can describe without paradox how someone’s expectation might be fulfilled by what they did not expect. What I expected was that a postman would deliver my mail. I did not know that Mr Smith the parson was also a postman, so I did not expect that he would deliver my mail. But he is a postman, so his delivery fulfills my expectation. This already is enough to show that there cannot be any straightforward identification between *what is expected* and *what fulfills the expectation*. What fulfills the

expectation is an event, while what is expected is an event conceived in a certain way.⁸

If we cannot identify what is expected with what fulfills the expectation, then how should we think of the relationship between these two things? As I have said, we can call what fulfills (or would fulfill) the expectation the *object* of the expectation. When we describe the expectation from the subject's point of view, we have to describe the object in a certain way – this is a description of *what is expected* in the sense just mentioned. Following Husserl, I call what is expected in this sense the *content* of the expectation (see Crane 2001: chapter 1). The content of the expectation is a representation of its object: it is a representation of what would fulfill it. Thus my general expectation that the postman will bring my mail in the morning is a representation of a type of state of affairs; this is its content. Any event that belongs to this type will be an event which fulfills the expectation, and may therefore be called the object of the expectation.

This description of the link between what is expected and what fulfills the expectation is more complicated than Wittgenstein's description that they are linked by the simple 'rule of signs': *the expectation that p = the expectation that is satisfied by the fact that p*. But as we have seen, this rule is inadequate, because it does not tell us that the event of Mr Smith the parson delivering my mail is one of the things that satisfies my expectation that the postman will deliver my mail. So we need the more complicated story.⁹

⁸ Of course, one could say, correctly, that the actual event *e* is the very same event as the event *e* conceived in a certain way; but this is not what I mean when I deny that these phenomena should be identified. For an event can be conceived in a certain way without there ever being such an event.

⁹ These remarks merely scratch the surface of the complexities of the semantics and the psychology underpinning our use of intentional verbs like 'expect'. A proper treatment would start by distinguishing the form of these verbs which take sentential

The point is not restricted to expectation, but it can also apply to propositions (or judgements) and what makes them true. If I judge that some of the best-value wines in the world are to be found in the South of France, then this judgement is certainly distinguished from others by its content (what is reported in the content-clause), but the judgement could be made true by a number of different states of affairs – for example, the best wines coming from Minervois, or from the Languedoc, or from Provence. All of these things would make true the judgement, and so to state what would make true the judgement, we can do much more than merely repeat the content clause of the judgement. (Similar points can be made about the other examples of intentionality discussed by Wittgenstein.)

It may be responded that Wittgenstein himself anticipated this point in the *Philosophical Grammar*, when he wrote:

Suppose you now ask: then are facts defined one way or another by an expectation – that is, is it defined for whatever event may occur whether it fulfils the expectation or not? The answer has to be: Yes, unless the expression of the expectation is indefinite, e.g. by containing a disjunction of different possibilities. (PG 162)

The example above might be thought to be one in which ‘the expression of the expectation is indefinite’ since there are a number of different facts (‘a disjunction of different possibilities’) that would satisfy it. So my expectation that the postman will deliver my mail in the morning would therefore count as an indefinite expectation since it is satisfied *either* by Mr Jones bringing my mail *or* Mr Smith bringing my mail.

It’s not clear that this would help, since Wittgenstein gives us no specific advice about how to construe the grammar of such ‘indefinite’ expectations. But in

complements and those which take noun-phrases (the so-called ‘intensional transitives’). See Forbes 2006 for a useful treatment of the second kind of verb.

any case, the suggestion seems off-key, since it doesn't seem right to call the expectation 'indefinite' in the first place. After all, I expect something perfectly definite: my mail to be delivered by the postman. To say that this is 'indefinite' seems to set a standard of definiteness which is not only very remote from the 'rough ground' of ordinary language which is the ostensible subject-matter of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but also independently implausible. It would be equally flat-footed to say that I have a 'disjunctive' expectation, any more than I make a 'disjunctive' judgement when I judge that the best-value wines come from the South of France.

Let me attempt to generalize the point. The thought that p can be made true by the fact that q ; the expectation that p can be made true by the fact that q ; the desire that p can be made true by the fact that q – and in all these cases, the fact that q can be distinct from the fact that p , on anyone's way of distinguishing facts. (The same thing can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for events.) This is as obvious as Wittgenstein's grammatical claim that the thought that p is the thought that is made true by the fact that p . I do not deny that Wittgenstein is right in making this grammatical claim – I only insist that there is more to be said. But it is not plausible that what more there is to be said is anything to do with grammar. If all that someone knows is that I expect the postman to deliver my mail, then it is true that they know *ipso facto* that my expectation is one which is fulfilled by the fact that the postman brings my mail. But they do not know *ipso facto* that it would be satisfied by Mr Smith the parson bringing my mail, since they might not know that Mr Smith the parson is a postman. And they would not fail to understand *what an expectation is* if they did not know this. So their lack of knowledge here would not be a failure to appreciate the grammar of 'expectation'. It is rather a lack of knowledge of the world. Yet it is *also* a lack of

knowledge of what would satisfy the expectation. Therefore the knowledge of what would satisfy the expectation that p cannot be restricted to the grammatical knowledge that the expectation simply is the expectation that p .

The point can be put in another way. Wittgenstein's answer in §437 to his own question about what makes a proposition true – 'Whence this *determining* of what is not yet there?' – seems to be this: the 'determining' of what is not there simply consists in the grammatical truth that 'the thought that p is the thought that is made true by the fact that p '. But, as we have observed, the thought that p can be made true by the fact that q : and this is not a grammatical remark.

It is for this reason that we must reject Wittgenstein's view that 'it is in language that an expectation and its fulfillment make contact' (§445). I interpreted this remark as follows: rather than thinking of the fulfillment of an expectation in terms of a relation between something linguistic (the expression of an expectation) and something non-linguistic (the fact which fulfils it), we should see that this apparent 'relation' is just a shadow of the grammatical truth that 'the expectation that p simply is the expectation that is fulfilled by the fact that p '. To say that the 'contact' is made 'in language' is another way of saying that the only 'relation' here is a grammatical one. Now I have just argued that the reason we should reject this claim of Wittgenstein's is that we could be in a position where we know that the expectation that p is fulfilled by the fact that q , where the fact that p is not the fact that q , and where *what we know when we know this* is not a matter of grammar at all. Therefore there is more to the relation between an expectation and its fulfillment than grammar. And the same applies to the other examples discussed by Wittgenstein of the relation between thought and reality.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that the problem of the relationship between thought and reality is not solved by the method of grammatical investigation; or at least, not by the employment of the grammatical remarks used by Wittgenstein in the sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* I have considered. Hacker and his followers are wrong to think that these passages provide a dissolution of the problems of intentionality identified by Wittgenstein. No satisfactory general account of intentionality is offered here.

If this argument is right, then we should be prepared to re-consider the idea that there might be something else that explains the connection, or apparent connection, between an expectation and what fulfils it, a proposition and what makes it true, an order and what executes it, and so on. This does not mean that we should return to the bad pictures discarded by Wittgenstein: that the expectation must 'already contain' what fulfils it, or that there is 'hocus pocus in the soul'. And nor should we return to the idea, defended by Hacker and others, that the only way for thought to genuinely concern an objective reality is for what you truly think to be identical with what is the case; for this would make falsehood impossible to understand.

The very natural idea which was briefly mentioned in the previous section is the idea of representation. The statement of an order represents its execution, an expectation represents what is expected, a judgement represents what it judged, and so on. An appeal to the notion of representation is not supposed to be a solution to the problem of intentionality, since 'representation' is arguably just another word for the same phenomenon. (For instance, representation, like intentionality, is not a relation to its objects since one can represent what does not exist.) However, one of the lessons of the previous section is that it is hard to see how we can make any progress

in even describing the phenomena if we cannot help ourselves to the concept of representation.

Those (like Bennett and Hacker 2003, for example) who think that the idea of representation always implies interpretation, with the result that any commitment to mental representation is either ‘hocus pocus in the soul’ or involves a further commitment to a ‘homunculus’, will resist this appeal to mental representation as a foundational notion in the study of intentionality. But we can reject their assumption that representation always implies interpretation. And in doing so, we can take our inspiration from Wittgenstein himself. For just as he argued that to solve the rule-following paradox, we need to accept that ‘there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation’ (PI §201), so we can say, in a similar vein, that there is a way of representing the world which does not, itself, need interpretation.¹⁰

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