Wittgenstein on Thought and Will

Roger Teichmann

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This book provides an exposition of Wittgenstein's ideas on thought, will, thinking, and intention. The author's main goal is to put Wittgenstein in context, that is comparing his position with preceding thinkers in the first chapter and with subsequent ones in the fifth chapter. The book might be divided into three parts: in the first part, the author exposes the main ideas on thought and will in philosophy *before* Wittgenstein, discussing such thinkers as Descartes, Locke, Hume, Frege and Russell. In the second part, which is the largest section of the book, Dr. Teichmann discusses Wittgenstein's views. The third part is about Wittgenstein's impact on recent philosophy of mind and philosophy of psychology. The first section is meant to give a philosophical and historical background which helps us understand Wittgenstein's peculiar treatment of age-old questions. With the last two sections the author conveys the idea that Wittgenstein has to say something really different on this topic from his predecessors and from the philosophers who have come after him.

It might be useful to specify that Dr. Teichmann is an internalist concerning the interpretation of Wittgenstein's style.[1] According to the author, Wittgenstein consciously adopted a non-discursive style for philosophical – not merely stylistic- reasons. The refusal of a conventional style of exposition is connected with the nature of the philosophical investigation.

Thought and will have been traditionally treated as elements of a dualism strictly connected with the dualism of inner and outer, typically associated with René Descartes: philosophers belonging to such a tradition have attempted to build a bridge between thought and reality, as well as between will and action. Dr. Teichmann argues that Wittgenstein's philosophical background is characterized by a *relational account* of thought and will, that is that the thinking or willing subject bears some relation with the content of her thought- or will. The author then distinguishes three families of approaches as to what kind of entities the objects of thought are: (A) items of the world. Russell's multiple-relation theory is given as a significant example; (B) mental items, such as ideas, pictures, images, which function as mental intermediaries between the thinker and the items in the

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[1] I'm referring to the distinction between the internalist and externalist interpretation of the relation between Wittgenstein's style and his philosophical method. I will not specify here whether Dr. Teichmann's reading belongs to the moderate version or the strong one. This distinction is found in Stern D.(2017) "Wittgenstein's Texts and Style", in Glock H.J. and Hyman J. (eds.), *A companion to Wittgenstein*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, pp. 41- 55.

world, such as in Lockean empiricism; (C) abstract entities that can be true or false, such as Frege's *Gedanke*. Dr. Teichmann attempts to show how these accounts face various problems and raise in turn some severe philosophical puzzles. Among these problems we find firstly the "Parmenidean challenge", also known as the problem of non-existent relata: if thought is conceived as a relation between a subject and *something*, that *something* should be real. But then, what about our thinking of all sorts of non-existent things, such as fairies and unicorns? Similarly, what about the case of unfulfilled wants or intentions? Moreover, there's the issue of how an item could represent anything. Finally, the problem of the dubitability of causes and effects, which applies to all causal accounts of the content of thought. On the whole, Dr. Teichmann argues that the problems just mentioned arise in part from "the idea that there is just one species of proper empirical explanation" of human behaviour (25). Modern philosophers aimed to *empirically explain* voluntary action by looking at the causes of phenomena. Given the suspicion about the Aristotelian notion of final cause, efficient causes and effects were taken as the sufficient elements for all respectable empirical explanation. On the author's account, this philosophical trend might be defined as monistic, that is as a philosophical move which reduces differences and stands in opposition with pluralistic accounts of human agency.

On Dr. Teichmann's account Wittgenstein is a philosopher who resisted the pull of such a monism by insisting on the conceptual pluralism as it is found in our thought and talk. In particular, (i) Wittgenstein resisted the philosophical puzzles arising from the traditional accounts by criticizing the deceptive notions of "intrinsic representation", "inner process", "introspective knowledge" and "mere causal relation"; (ii) he gave us a multifaceted account of thought and will by stressing the point of language games, i.e. how they fit into human life given the sort of creatures human beings are. The author distinguishes early Wittgenstein's treatment of the topic from his later works, but he tries at the same time to show how his ideas developed over the years; although there are undeniable differences between the *Tractatus* and the later production, some ideas persisted in a different form, therefore a certain continuity must be acknowledged.

Dr. Teichmann first addresses Wittgenstein's treatment of the problem of intentionality – the relation between thought and objects of thought. This issue is introduced as the problem of the *distinctness of phenomena*, namely the seemingly difference between conative phenomenon and the event that satisfies it. Given this *distinctness*, how can we use the same words to describe both events? We might posit an external relation between a mental state and its object, as in Russell's theory of desire, or we might rather say that the relation is internal, and it is between a mental image and the object. The distinction between an external relation and an internal relation of thought and

reality, will, and action, is a recurrent theme in the book and it is used by the author to characterize the way in which Wittgenstein's ideas developed during his lifetime. Both early and late Wittgenstein share the basic insight that the relation between a thought and reality is an internal one. Discontinuities lie in the conception of the nature of this internal relation. In the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein already posited an internal relation between the elements of reality and the elements of thought, conceived as a "logical picture". This relation is purely logical, not having to do with psychological and social phenomena. By contrast, the late Wittgenstein came to realize that "representation cannot be properly understood abstracted from the empirical phenomenon of human language" (ix) and he thus came to reject the exclusion of the psychological and the social dimension that characterized his earlier work. It should be noted that this exclusion still has Fregean roots and it is expression of Wittgenstein's semantic anti-psychologism. This form of anti-psychologism, which entails no attempt to assert the non-existence of mental states or processes, is not rejected by the late Wittgenstein. Dr. Teichmann is not explicit on this issue, but he probably regards the return of the psychological and social dimension as a matter of renewed emphasis on ordinary language and human behaviour, in addition to the extension of the philosophical enquiry so as to include psychological concepts, such as understanding, agreeing, and intending.

The author's overall discussion of Wittgenstein's later ideas on thought and will might be thus summarized:

1. The relation between thought and reality, and between will and action, is *internal*, namely, it is to be found *in language*;

2. Wittgenstein substitutes a grammatical enquiry for a metaphysical one, the latter being source of philosophical confusion;

3. Wittgenstein's methodological key move is to look at the "bigger picture" by stressing the importance of *context* and *behaviour*.

The notion of *fact* plays a central role. According to Dr. Teichmann, Wittgenstein shows us that nothing justifies our using the same words to describe both the conative phenomenon and the content of thought: there is just the fact that we, as members of a linguistic community, do use words in a wide variety of interconnected situations. The paradox of the distinctiveness/similarity between the phenomenon of expecting an event and the event itself comes from the picture of a metaphysical bridge which connects two realms, and it can be avoided by recognizing the grammatical connection between the use of an expression like "Sarah is expecting him to come" and "He has come". "It is in language that expectation and its fulfilment make contact" (PI 445) and Dr. Teichmann goes on to say that "it is in language that a thought and what renders it true make contact" (46). People learn concepts by learning how to use certain cluster of words, but the use is

tied up with phenomenon of human life. The author interprets Wittgenstein's remarks on psychological concepts and natural expressions as statements about the empirical and human background which would underpin the unity of language games. There are thus pre-linguistic shared human capacities, and capacities acquired through language acquisition. According to Dr. Teichmann, this emphasis on the empirical background is what is lacking in Hacker's notion of "intra-grammatical". Hacker claims that intentionality should be understood through a conceptual elucidation of the internal relation between "I expect that p" and "p". The synonymy of "p" in the two contexts comes from the fact that we would give similar ostensive explanations of what we meant. No other fact is involved. Dr. Teichmann argues that if it were so, we only had mere brute facts about our linguistic practices. By contrast, part of the grammatical enquiry consists in identifying the point of language games, i.e. their place in the context of human life and activities. Such a schema is applied not only to the general problem of intentionality, but also to Wittgenstein's remarks on "thinking" and "intending": expressing intentions is a game that people have mastered, it is not a report of an inner process. However, this game is linked with a shared human capacity which constitutes part of its own point, namely the fact that we can often predict a man's action from his expression of intention. Similarly, we learn the use of "think" as part of a linguistic training. This use is anchored to the conceptually central case of human beings but it involves no recognition and identification of a particular object as the referent of "I". Dr. Teichmann argues that Wittgenstein's grammatical enquiry shows the danger of the myth of the philosophical subject and reinstates the fully-fledged human being as the paradigm subject of thought and will.

One of the book's strengths is the treatment of Wittgenstein's ideas in a wider context. The author compares Wittgenstein's views with the philosophical tradition and makes reference to other philosophers who were informed by Wittgenstein's works, primarily Elisabeth Anscombe. Anscombe's works are used to say something on topics which Wittgenstein did not explicitly treat, but which could be treated from a Wittgensteinian perspective; *On Brute Facts* and *The first person* are two examples. This move broadens Wittgenstein's thought and brings out the richness of his philosophy, that is its relevance to current debates. However, going beyond Wittgenstein might raise some problems from an exegetical point of view if the move is not clearly stated. Actually, after having discussed the connection between language games and human behaviour, for example, Dr. Teichmann writes that his account is rather an elaboration of Wittgenstein, and Hacker's exegesis stays closer to the texts (45). However, the reader has to come across the whole paragraph before finding the clarification, therefore understanding might be harder. As far as content is

concerned, Dr. Teichmann rightly underlines the importance assigned to context and behaviour by looking at the way in which Wittgenstein employs the latter notion. Moreover, the extensive use of the notions of practice and capacity effectively gathers the peculiarity of the philosopher's treatment of the question at issue.

Some shortcomings might be individuated from a systematic point of view. The general structure of the book is clear, though the internal development occasionally adds confusion. Some important subjects are introduced and subsequently abandoned. Dr. Teichmann's treatment of Wittgenstein's remarks on the picture of "inner process", for example, would benefit from a more extensive exposition of Wittgenstein's ideas on Rule-Following. Similarly, the author does not mention Kripke's and Fogelin's works.[2] A greater focus on Fogelin's "defactoism" seems crucial in the light of the emphasis given to the notion of fact and the problem of *brute facts*.

Overall, then, the book addresses Wittgenstein's treatment of a traditional philosophical problem. Any scholar interested in the topic of thought and intention could benefit from engaging with this book but in-depth knowledge of Wittgenstein's philosophy seems necessary to fully understand the author's contribution on this subject, therefore students might not be the main target audience.

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[2] Kripke S. (1982), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private language*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Fogelin R.J. (2009), *Taking Wittgenstein at his word. A textual study*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.