

## **Why Enough Should Be Enough: the Role of Expressive Behaviour**

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In his book, *Expression and the Inner*, D. Finkelstein offers a persuasive deconstruction of what could be described as the paradox of the infra-determination of meaning. It is a version of the paradox that is mentioned in *Philosophical Investigations* [PI], §201. Finkelstein's position, that tries to be also an exegesis of Wittgenstein's own thought, connects certain epistemological issues with some constitutive and metaphysical aspects of meaning. On the one hand, he insists that, in paradigmatic cases, we cannot perceive any gap between certain ways of expressing meaning and the meaning so expressed. We do not normally perceive an order in our native language as a phonetic sequence that needs to be interpreted, nor do we perceive a written sentence as a series of dead printed marks. On the other hand, he argues that the illusion that there must be such a gap is created by not paying due attention to the fact that the issue of meaning only arises in the context of human practices, in the weave of life. I agree on the relevance of those facts. Particularly, I agree that the apparent paradox of content infra-determination that Wittgenstein mentions in PI §201 is based on not paying due attention to them.

Nevertheless, the issue is about what should count as paying due attention to those facts. And, here, I have a slight disagreement with Finkelstein's overall strategy. It is true, for example, that normally we do not feel we have alternative options in our way of understanding an instruction. In a normal context, we can only perceive a certain determined meaning in a certain sequence of phonemes, not some other, different and incompatible meanings. The problem is the modal status of "can", in the last sentence. Perhaps we can only perceive a certain determined content in a certain verbal or written expression. But, if this were only a mere factual impossibility, an impossibility that would not exist if certain contingent facts were different, I doubt that Finkelstein's remarks on the role of human practices could be enough to totally dispel the illusion of infra-determination. In order to preserve a full-blooded notion of determinate meaning, we must show that certain abilities that are grounded on contingent facts of human nature set the limits of what

is conceptually possible. It is due to contingent facts that we perceive a determinate content or a determinate meaning when faced with certain expressions. Nevertheless, this does not entail that someone different from us might have completely deviant perceptions of content or meaning in the same situations. Because those completely deviant epistemic reactions could not count as perceptions of content or meaning at all.

## I

I agree with Finkelstein that Wittgenstein's appeal to the weave of our life, our customs, and our practices has not the role of filling the putative gap between a linguistic instruction and its meaning. This is crucial. The weave of life is not the thing that allows us to fill the gap. Nothing could fill the gap, because in fact, within the weave of our life, there is no such a gap. The interesting issue still is how this can be shown to be true. For everything Finkelstein says, this fact is *made evident* by some epistemic facts: within the weave of life, within our practices, we cannot perceive such a gap. But, again, for him those seem to be just brute facts. Nothing in what he says seems to prevent the intelligibility of an epistemic reaction that were completely different from ours. For instance, the epistemic reaction of someone who, due to his different nature, had completely bizarre perceptions of content and meaning. If this is a possibility, I doubt that we could justify the notion of a determinate meaning that Finkelstein tries to preserve. In fact, for everything he says, nothing in the past practice seems to be able to protect us against the intelligibility of completely deviant ways of applying language to new situations. It is pointless to insist that we are factually protected by Mother Nature against this possibility. The fact that we have been led by our nature and the processes of socialization to understand some linguistic expression in a certain way without the need of interpretation, does not seem to entail that we cannot conceive of people who, for instance, tomorrow would start reacting in a completely different, bizarre, and deviant way. Of course, we can always say that those strange, deviant people would be giving different meanings to our words. This might be true, but the problem would still be that those alternative meanings would be equally rooted and determined – if our meanings are supposed to be determined – in the common past practice of using language. So it seems to be possible to legitimately provide incompatible descriptions of the meanings that are determined in our practices, our institutions, and our customs.

This looks like a *reductio* of the idea of a determinate meaning, unless you understand meaning-determination in a much deflated way, a way that Finkelstein, rightly in my view, tries to avoid. For, against Kripkean skepticism and the kind of account that has been proposed by C. Wright, he is

happy to accept that our future agreement on how to apply our words is to be based on the fact that we have endowed them with a determinate meaning. For him, and for me, the best judgments about how to follow a rule do track the fact that the rule has to be followed in such and such a way. But then we need a satisfactory answer to the challenge I have just described: how could this be true if, for everything Finkelstein says, we can coherently conceive of completely deviant extensions of our actual practices?

## II

To avoid certain ambiguities in the word “expression” that could interfere with my main argument, let’s distinguish, when talking about rules, between a rule and the formulation of a rule. Finkelstein, following what is Wittgenstein’s own terminology, sometimes discusses the issue in terms of the relations between a rule and its conditions of application. This terminological option should not make us forget that the connection between a rule and its conditions of application is obviously an internal connection. On the contrary, formulations of a rule are particulars (non-intentionally characterized events, objects) that should be carefully distinguished from the rule of which they are formulations. Properly speaking, there cannot be any paradox, not even the appearance of a paradox, about how it is possible for a rule to determine certain conditions of correct application instead of other, different conditions. There cannot be an apparent paradox here, because it is a trivial truth that a rule is constituted by its conditions of correct application. If there is something that looks like a paradox (the one Wittgenstein mentions in PI §201) it has to be a paradox concerning the connections between particular formulations of a rule and the rule that is supposed to be the content of those formulations.

Once the problem is put in those terms, I agree with the spirit of some crucial aspects of Finkelstein’s diagnosis. It is a crucial fact that in front of certain *formulations* of a rule, we grasp the rule, without the need of an interpretation: normally, we do not perceive the printed marks in a book as just mere marks that need to be interpreted, or we do not perceive an order in our native language as a mere phonetic sequence that needs to be interpreted in some way or other. We understand it, and we do not think that there are other, incompatible ways of understanding it that we should take into account. I also accept that those special particulars I have called “formulations of a rule” do not determine by themselves their corresponding rule, outside the proper context of human practices. To consider that certain particulars (phonetic sequence, printed marks) could mean something outside a context of use is a blatant confusion. It is also true that, once we have granted all this, Finkelstein could insist that there must be a determinate meaning to be per-

ceived, if we perceive meaning at all. It cannot be true that we grasp a rule when we witness certain formulations, without it being true that there is a rule that is grasped. But we must notice that this would be dialectically irrelevant. The challenge I have described in the first section could now be reformulated by insisting that what has to be shown is that this thing that we perceive is a determinate rule, or a determinate meaning. I do not deny that we perceive meaning without the need of interpretation. Nor do I deny that that the whole point of Wittgenstein's arguments in this regard depends on the idea that there is no reductive account of basic intentional and semantic notions. I am only suggesting that something more has to be said than merely insisting that we do not perceive a gap between certain verbal instructions, or certain printed marks, and their expressed content, if we want to successfully dispel the illusion of infra-determination.

### III

Consider the case in which we perceive the content that certain basic forms of animal behaviour express. Imagine a dog that tries to catch a cat, while the cat is trying to escape from the predator. Here we have content to be perceived. As in the previous case of following a rule or understanding a linguistic expression, we can insist on the epistemology of our corresponding perception. Our perception of this basic intentional content is as unjustified – if not more- as our perception of linguistic meaning. But, if we pay attention to cases of this kind, it seems more plausible to insist that we cannot conceive systematically deviant perceptions of content. The reactions of an observer of situations of this kind could never justify our attribution to him of systematically bizarre beliefs about the content that the behaviour of the animals expresses. At most, we could be justified to say that the observer is completely blind to intentional content.

My disagreement with Finkelstein's strategy can be expressed, then, by reflecting on the links between three different principles:

- (a) We cannot but perceive a determinate intentional content in front of certain forms of behaviour, in spite of the fact that our perception of content is an unjustified epistemic reaction.
- (b) We cannot but perceive a determinate meaning in front of certain linguistic formulations, in spite of the fact that our perception of meaning is an unjustified epistemic reaction.

Finkelstein would endorse, I guess, both (a) and (b). Me too. Finkelstein would accept both principles as establishing what we can call "factual possi-

bilities” — given certain basic facts of our nature we cannot but react to content and meaning in the way we do. He could easily accept, I guess, that the truth of (b) depends on the truth of (a): to see this, we only need to assume certain basic connections between intentionality and linguistic meaning. Be that as it may, in no part of his argument the truth of (a) and (b) is connected to the truth of another, much stronger principle:

- (c) We cannot conceive of some systematic, completely deviant perception of intentional content in front of certain forms of behaviour, in spite of the fact that our perception of content is an unjustified epistemic reaction.

If (c) is true, the kind of impossibility that is mentioned in (a) and (b) depends on natural facts in a subtler way than Finkelstein’s position suggests. Our impossibility to stop perceiving a determinate content depends on certain brute, natural facts. Nature forces us to see certain intentions and beliefs when animals behave in a certain way. By altering certain aspects of our nature, any of us could lose this ability. But this does not entail that we can conceive the ability to have completely deviant perceptions of intentional content. Simply, because there is nothing we could conceive that could count as someone having completely deviant perceptions of intentional content. In front of certain basic expressions of content, there is no conceivable, systematically different epistemic reaction from ours that could count as a perception or misperception of content, just because the completely deviant perception would not count as perception of content, at all. In the same sense, it might be argued that a completely deviant epistemic reaction, after certain linguistic training, would count as the lack of ability to perceive meaning at all. But, still, the force of (a) and (b) depends on (c): there is some asymmetry between intentional content and linguistic meaning that explains why (c) is a principle about perception of intentional content. Without intentionality there is no linguistic meaning, but there can be intentionality without linguistic meaning.

#### IV

Finkelstein pays attention to situations in which principle (b) holds but his discussion of those cases is completely neutral regarding the truth of (c). This could seem right if we interpreted some crucial paragraphs in the *Investigations* as establishing that certain epistemic reactions – bizarrely deviant from our natural reactions – are something more than a local possibility, that they are conceivable in front of every case of content. If we accepted, for instance, that the strange pupil that systematically misunderstands certain in-

structions, in PI, §§ 143 or 185, could react in a similarly deviant way to every case of content or, after the corresponding process of training, to every linguistic instruction. This pupil is able to perceive that he is been taught some meaning, while, at the same time, he systematically misperceives the meaning that he is been taught. But it does not seem right to assume that this epistemic situation is something conceivable in front of every expression of content. Nobody can be described as grasping intentional content while, at the same time, systematically grasping the wrong kind of content. Without taking this into account, I do not think it is possible to show that content can be determined. And without determinate intentional content, there is no way of arguing for the determination of linguistic meaning.

I am then suggesting that meaning can be determinate because our epistemic ability to grasp certain basic expressions of intentional — non linguistic- content has certain features that do not seem to play any role in Finkelstein's account. Basically: it is not only that in front of certain expressions of content we naturally react in a certain way. This is true, but it is not enough. The crucial point is that our natural reactions put the boundaries to what is conceptually possible regarding content. We could make all the bizarre exercises of imagination that we wished. But we must be very careful when trying to describe what we are imagining. There is something that cannot be the content of our imagination: some animal that systematically perceives intentionality in a completely bizarre way. There cannot be such a thing, and there cannot be any coherent conception of it. Simply, in basic cases of intentionality, there cannot be alternative, systematically bizarre perceptions of content that would count as perceptions of content. There is no fallacy of anthropocentrism here. There cannot be completely different conceptions from ours of what counts as trying to escape from an approaching animal.

We can insist that our reaction in front of content would be completely different, if we had a different nature. It is a contingent fact that there is intentionality in the world. There are possible worlds without animal life, and in such worlds there is no intentionality to be perceived, and there is not even the ability to perceive intentionality. But there is no possible world in which intentionality is expressed in completely different ways to the ways we consider normal. The accusation of anthropocentrism here can only be grounded on some conception of what intentional properties and intentional types are that, I guess, Finkelstein would consider as a complete *cul-de-sac*. He would agree with me that there is nothing like a putative “hidden essence” of what are commonly described as “natural kinds” in the case of basic intentions and beliefs.

## V

When perceiving, for instance, a basic expression of intention in the behaviour of an animal, we see the behaviour as depicting intentional content. By seeing that an animal tries to escape, I see that it is not an accident that it keeps on running in a determinate direction. The first reflections of Wittgenstein on those connections can be dated at the beginning of the 1930s, and they are explicitly discussed again in the second half of the first part of *Philosophical Investigations*. Of course, for Wittgenstein, the hardness of the logical must is a grammatical product; it is generated by the internal connections between certain descriptions of phenomena: in the description of the content of an intention, we use the very same words that we use to describe the situation that counts as a satisfaction of the intention. But this could not happen in a void. This is possible because we are able to see – against deflationary, behaviourist, or no-fact-of-the-matter accounts – the directionality in the world of certain forms of behaviour. Some animal can be in the process of trying to catch a prey before the prey is caught, or even if the prey is never caught. Perceiving something as the process of trying to catch a prey entails seeing that certain fragments of behaviour are not accidentally connected. The internal connection between a picture and what the picture depicts, the internal connection between meaning and truth conditions, the internal connection between an intention and its conditions of satisfaction, all require that the world should exhibit non accidental connections between different fragments of expressive behaviour. Without them, there is no intentionality.

Both in *Philosophical Remarks* [PR] and in the *Philosophical Grammar* [PG], we can find remarks that can be paraphrased in terms of the thesis that the intentional object can only be fixed by expressive behaviour: “Tell me how you are searching, and I will tell you what you are looking for”. [PR, 27]. Those types of considerations antedate the considerations that form the nucleus of the reflections on following a rule in *Philosophical Investigations*. It is determined now that I am looking for something that could, or could not, be found in the future. That I am looking for it, now, is independent of my finding it, even independent of its existence. But my way of behaving now depicts what I am looking for and it is internally connected to my ability to recognize that I have found what I was looking for. By themselves, those are considerations about what could be called “proto-phenomenon”: those basic cases in which our possession of intentional concepts is manifested. It is by reference to those cases that the meaning of intentional terms is learned. But they give us a clue about why it is conceptually impossible to dig below this proto-phenomenon.

We are able to perceive the intentional content of action when we observe what could be described as certain physical changes. I’m not suggesting that those merely physical movements are necessarily part of our perceptual

content when we perceive action; I am only saying that there is a way of describing the world we face with open eyes that does not make use of intentional concepts. We could even say that we see a set of physical movements as intentional action. But accepting this, I am not assuming that those physical movements are some “uninterpreted”, “given”, ingredient of our perceptual content. And, of course, the intentional description of a situation cannot be reduced to physical or merely behavioural language. This is, I guess, common ground between Finkelstein and me. Nevertheless, even granting all that, we should insist that someone who, when witnessing those situations in which we naturally perceive content, did not share a substantial part of our epistemic reactions, did not normally see the content we see, would be blind to content. There is no mystery here. It is not that this being would be blind to some magical pictorial powers that certain physical movements have — some magical pictorial powers that, for instance, the printed marks in a book do not have. On the contrary, it is because of the fact that nothing could have those magical pictorial powers that basic cases of content are determined by our epistemic reaction to them. This is why intentionality does not have a hidden essence. And there are two fallacies that should be carefully avoided. The first one is to think that the world itself does not have intentional aspects. In no way I would say that Finkelstein’s account can be accused of being tempted by it. But, perhaps, he does not insist enough on the dangers of a second fallacy: to think that, if our epistemic reactions had been completely different, then we would have had completely different perceptions of content. Just because intentional types depend on our epistemic reaction when we face certain forms of animal behaviour, a completely different epistemic reaction would not count as a perception of intentionality.

Following Finkelstein’s own terminology, we could say that the role of the weave of life is not to cross the gap between a particular object (mental or physical), or the non intentional aspects of a piece of behaviour, and the expressed content. Nothing can do the job, because the putative job to be done has not been properly identified. The whole point of Wittgenstein’s criticism both of classical and behaviourist accounts of intentionality is that no reductive account can preserve the hardness of the logical must. And the argument does not work by just rejecting certain candidates to be the basis of the putative reduction. Wittgenstein’s obsession against dead mental particulars is not only justified because of their historical appeal to classical conceptions of intentionality, or because they are the only dialectical option to straight, behaviouristic elimination, but because the diagnosis of their failures shows something very important about the impossibility of finding grounds for basic attributions of intentionality. There is nothing in virtue of which intentionality takes off: there is no set of non-intentionally specified features in a mental particular or in a piece of behaviour that could fix content. The vindication of certain basic expressions as the proto-phenomenon of intentionality is not a



mere elimination of some putative, alternative more basic phenomenon. Any such candidate would introduce the gap that Finkelstein denounces. If we insist on considering some non intentional aspects of the world as the proper bearers of intentionality, then we face the terrible dilemma: either we introduce intentionality by the back door – adding the requirement of an interpretation of the dead particulars – or we renounce in some form or other the idea of proper, determined content.

Naturalizing, reductive programmes of intentionality assume that there must be some (non-intentional) facts in virtue of which minds manage to represent. This is the unintelligible assumption that Wittgenstein's criticism of non-intentional features as bearers of representation tries to attack. We can intelligibly ask of a conventional representation (a name, a predicate, a map, a sentence): in virtue of what does it represent what it represents? If intentionality is possible at all, there must be certain proto-phenomena about which this question cannot be asked. We could say that our perception of intentionality in this case is not based on interpretation; it is just a matter of our reaction. This would simply be an epistemological point: it is because we react in certain ways that we can have epistemic access to the expressed content in certain basic forms of action. Nevertheless, the most important metaphysical consequence concerns the form of the attributed content. In no way can we use the previous reconstruction of Wittgenstein's argument to justify the idea that certain forms of behaviour manage to have the same kinds of pictorial powers that mental, detached particulars cannot have. Nothing could have pictorial powers in splendid isolation from our reaction in front of it. But this does not have the consequence that alternative, bizarre reactions in front of expressive behaviour would determine alternative, bizarre expressed intentional contents. It does not open the conceivability of perceiving alternative, bizarre contents. Because in the same sense in which our unjustified reactions are a condition of possibility of our perception of intentional content, they also are a condition of possibility of possessing intentional concepts, and determine the content of those concepts. A systematically bizarre reaction in front of expressive behaviour cannot be described as a case of perception of content.

Our system of natural reactions provides the framework of measurement for the content we attribute. However, this does not mean that the attributed content is a description of such a framework. Nor does it mean that we can make sense of other, alternative and very different, ways of determining contents. These alternatives would not be conceivable as ways of measuring intentional content. What they would measure would be something different. The human system of reactions allows us to measure contents, and determines what it is like to measure contents. It does not determine what it is like "to-measure-contents-for-us", but to measure contents, full stop. Something completely different would not be an alternative way of perceiving con-

tents. So, I am not objecting to Finkelstein's account that he does not provide a reductive account of meaning, when he insists that we do not perceive a gap between certain formulations and the meaning they express. But I am suggesting that, in order to preserve a full blooded account of meaning-determination, we should show why it is conceptually impossible to have completely deviant perceptions of meaning and content.<sup>2</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will talk about an “unjustified” epistemic reaction in the particular sense in which Wittgenstein distinguishes the absence of such a justification from the lack of epistemic right. A perceptual belief is unjustified, in this sense, when the perceiving subject cannot provide reasons why she forms it — she can only appeal to the fact that she is in the epistemic situation that allows her to form this particular belief: “because I see it clearly”. This is not, of course, the sense of “unjustified” that is relevant for the issue of knowledge. A perceptual belief can be unjustified in this sense while, nevertheless, having the kind of justification that knowledge requires.

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#### RESUMEN

Sugeriré la necesidad de fundamentar uno de los argumentos cruciales en el libro de David Finkelstein, *Expression and the Inner*, en ciertas consideraciones generales sobre la irreductibilidad de la intencionalidad. La determinación del significado lingüístico requiere la determinación del contenido intencional. No niego la relevancia del hecho, sobre el que Finkelstein insiste correctamente, de que, normalmente, no percibimos ninguna fisura entre ciertas formas de expresión y el contenido expresado. Esta es una observación epistemológica fundamental: no necesitamos interpretar cier-

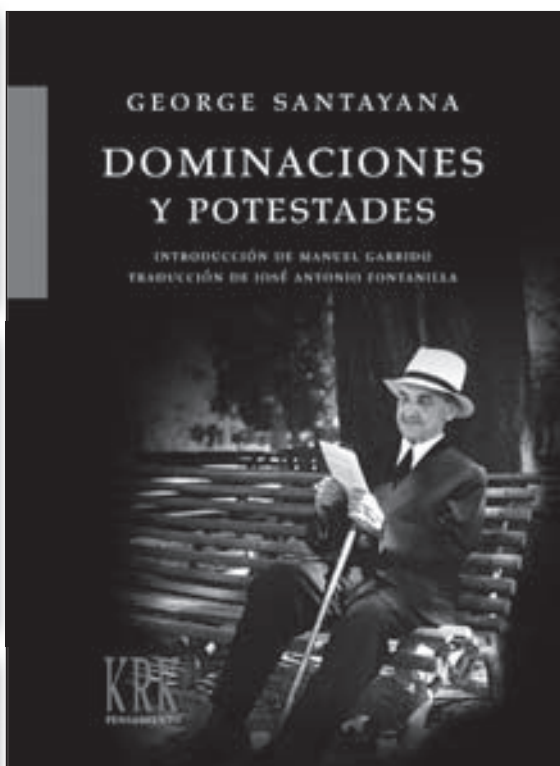
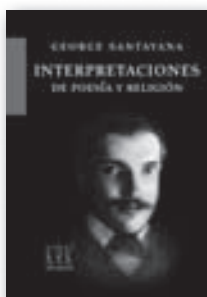
tas formas de básicas de expresión. Para mostrar que el contenido intencional está determinado, debemos insistir también en el hecho de que nuestra ciega reacción epistémica impone límites a lo que puede contar como una manera concebible de expresar o percibir contenidos intencionales básicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *significado, contenido, expresión, Wittgenstein, Finkelstein.*

ABSTRACT

I will suggest the need to ground one of the key arguments in David Finkelstein's book, *Expression and the Inner*, on some general considerations about the irreducibility of intentionality. The determination of linguistic meaning requires the determination of intentional content. I do not deny the relevance of the fact, on which Finkelstein rightly insists, that we do not normally perceive any gap between certain forms of expression and the expressed content. This is a crucial epistemic point: we do not need to interpret certain basic forms of expression. In order to show that intentional content is determined, we must also insist on the fact that our blind epistemic reactions set the limits of what should count as conceivable ways of expressing and perceiving basic intentional contents.

KEYWORDS: *Meaning, Content, Expression, Wittgenstein, Finkelstein.*



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