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Pushing Wittgenstein and Quine Closer Together

Gary Kemp

As against the view represented here by Peter Hacker and John Canfield, I urge that the philosophies of Quine and Wittgenstein can be reconciled. Both replace the orthodox view of language as resting on reference: Quine with the notion of linguistic disposition, Wittgenstein with the notions of grammar and forms of life. I argue that Wittgenstein's insistence, in the rule-following discussion, that at bottom these are matters of practice, of 'what we do', is not only compatible in a rough sort of way with Quine's outlook, but is very close to Quine's naturalistic view of language. And I argue that the likely objections to this can on the one hand be explained away as Quine's having been interested in a very narrow slice of language in comparison with Wittgenstein, and on the other by a failure to take into account later developments in Quine's views.

Pushing Wittgenstein and Quine Closer Together

Gary Kemp

My title might suggest pushing two negatively charged particles together; the closer they come, the greater the repellent force. Peter Hacker thinks so:

The one is (to use Isaiah Berlin's Archilochean typology) an exemplary 'hedgehog', a methodological monist, a defender of scienticism in philosophy, a naturalizing epistemologist and propounder of an ontology guided by physics and canonical notation. The other is a paradigmatic 'fox', a methodological pluralist appalled at the misguided idea that only forms of knowledge and understanding are scientific, who viewed scientific method in philosophy as the source of misconceived metaphysics, who socialized epistemology without naturalizing it, and held that the canonical notation of mathematical logic had completely deformed the thinking of philosophers. (1996a pp. 32-3)

Yet despite their enormous differences of style and presentation, superficial but broad similarities between Wittgenstein and Quine are not hard to find, many of which Hacker himself points out (see 1996b pp. 189-93). Neither held that the philosopher occupies a wholly detached, critical perspective on ordinary beliefs or the world—for Quine there is no 'first philosophy', for Wittgenstein there is nothing for it but to accept forms of life, to plunge into the 'hurly-burly' of pre-existing language-games. Neither set much store by the purported explanatory value of private experience or

mental entities; although neither can happily be called a 'behaviourist'—since neither held that the meaning of terms could be reduced to or defined in terms of behaviour—it was central to both philosophers that one's grasp of language cannot outstrip what can be found out by observing or taking part in linguistic behaviour. And both thought that the external world sceptic in some sense violates the presuppositions or norms of their own language, sawing off the branch on which they sit.

In addition—and I'll try to support this later—many apparent clashes can plausibly be explained away as serving different aims, with a corresponding difference of emphasis. Wittgenstein sought to dispose of or relieve philosophical problems by working within our conceptual landscape, surveying our language games or forms of life, getting his reader and himself to see that the apparent problems are inevitable only so long as one clings to a hopelessly oversimplified model of language. Quine is not so interested in what Wittgenstein calls philosophical problems; he is interested primarily in showing how to carry out a positive task at a higher level of precision, abstraction and generality than is customary in science itself, namely the formulation of a maximally clear and streamlined version of the whole of science. So, although there is overlap, the two were largely interested in different things, and it should not be surprising if, in the main, the two should turn out to be consistent.

But I think the central and more substantive point of agreement, the one that stands at the heart of each figure's philosophy, is this. Both figures held that, for certain philosophical purposes, it is better to replace the notion of meaning with that of use. And both held that explicit rules or conventions cannot account for that use. So far, more superficial similarities. But for Wittgenstein, a

basic lesson of the *Philosophical Investigations* is that the simplified model of the workings of language in terms of reference or naming, which he describes at the outset of the book, even if it is not simply false, is fundamentally misleading, largely because like a Potemkin village it is so superficial and facile. Such a theory simply conceals, papers over, areas of the most urgent philosophical concern (or philosophical confusion). It is in danger not only of taking the crucial thing for granted, but of imposing a false uniformity, a factitious appearance of order. For reasons made clearer below, such is intimately connected with the so-called 'rule-following' discussion: the following of rules—learned by copying others, ostensive instruction, and so on—already assumes that one will take what one observes in particular ways. The capacity or disposition to go on correctly—by adding two or whatever—is in the end presupposed in the subject, much as it is in Socrates' slave-boy of the *Meno*. That fundamental reality is what makes it possible to speak blithely of meaning, in the way we do.

Quine also rejects the standard picture of language as based on the concepts of meaning and reference; according to Quine's naturalism, an explanation of language in terms of use—conceived as linguistic dispositions—is all that may appropriately be asked of an account (as in *The Roots of Reference* 1974, *Pursuit of Truth* 1990). Again, because Quine's focus is extremely narrow—consisting only of language held to be necessary for science—and because he is not concerned to diagnose the roots of philosophical confusion in anything like the variety of ways that Wittgenstein attempted, he is silent on much of what interests Wittgenstein. But Quine's talk of linguistic dispositions is indeed very close to Wittgenstein's talk of how in the end one must 'act blindly'—of how one 'goes on', of what one is disposed to *do*. I shall even go so far as to char-

acterise them both as *linguistic naturalists*: Both figures reject the picture of language as resting on reference, or as explained by grasp of rules or meaning, and both reject the first-person position as basic.

All of this requires, of course, considerable elaboration and qualification. And at least two philosophers have asserted the opposite: Hacker, quoted above, and John Canfield, in different ways, urge that the similarity just canvassed is only apparent, that actually the two conceptions of use are antithetical (and that Wittgenstein's conception is far superior). Hacker argues the point as only part of a more general comparison between the two, only a few bits of which I will comment on in what follows, but what will emerge is that Hacker, like Canfield, is not so much wrong in interpreting and favouring Wittgenstein as mistaken about what Quine's views are. This paper is by no means anti-Wittgenstein, but perhaps it is pro-Quine.

One matter that might be thought central to comparing Quine to Wittgenstein, especially where Quine is concerned, is that of radical translation. I will say a little more at the right moment, but as will emerge I think it more than evident that none of Quine's famous conclusions as regards radical translation are essential to his philosophy; they serve to dramatise his view, but do not play the role of supporting members within it.

Wittgenstein

The story of Wittgenstein and rule-following has been told innumerable many times before, and in strikingly divergent ways. My interpretation will perhaps strike some as tendentious, but it does share crucial features of those of such figures as McDowell (1984),

Diamond (1991), M. McGinn (1997), Long (2010), Child (2011)—and especially Fogelin (2009).

Contra perhaps the famous reading by Kripke (1982), it is essential to this reading to keep *PI* §136 firmly in mind, which asserts what is nowadays known as truth-deflationism: for any declarative sentence *S*, *S* is equivalent to “*S* is true”; hence in particular “Joey means Φ ” is equivalent to “‘Joey means Φ ’ is true”, in which case it is unintelligible to deny truth-values to the former. But then we cannot follow Kripke in denying them truth-conditions. Such declarative sentences have truth-conditions, but to say so does not add anything to merely saying that they are declarative sentences.

It is no less essential to keep *PI* §5 firmly in mind: the notion of meaning is *not* the key to understanding the phenomenon of language or language-games. The notion is general in its application only because it is vague, sensitive to context and multi-dimensional (see *BB* p. 43). It is a word we habitually use, for example, when we lack an understanding or miss the point of how an expression is used. To say that all that we need is an account of meaning is to say nothing, nothing at any rate that advances the understanding of philosophical problems. Meaning is motley; it is at most a family resemblance concept, useful in the individual case as informed by context, and for generalising in a rough sort of way, but apt to mislead if pressed into a theory. Philosophical insight is achieved rather by observing in detail the vast variety of uses of language, all interwoven inextricably with practices, as shown in the simple examples of the grocer and the builder, and ramifying outwards to subtleties of psychological description and so on. So to suggest an account of *meaning* in terms

of the assertibility conditions of *meaning*-ascriptions, as Kripke does, is to recommend precisely what Wittgenstein warns against.

An analogous and equally important criticism appertains to an account of language in terms of reference, or naming. Augustine, Frege, Russell, and arguably his own former self, proposed or described accounts of language with this concept seemingly at the centre. So for example ‘Socrates is wise’ is explained as the attribution of the concept or property named by the predicate—*wisdom*—to the object named by the singular term—Socrates; I shall somewhat misappropriate a usage of Quine's in calling this the ‘copy theory’ of language (*OR* p. 27). Of course one admires the accounts that tend to accompany the basics of the copy theory of the compositional or recursive structure of language. The most pressing problem with such a theory however is not that it is false, but that it remains obstinately on the surface, leaving unaddressed the complexity, the real substance, of what lies beneath (*PI* §13). In order to explain such a concept as *wisdom*—or rather the use of the word—we would have to tell the novice that it is a praiseworthy feature of certain individuals, what the differences are between wisdom and intelligence and between wisdom and knowledge, show him the sort of people that might be taken as displaying it, that it has certain inertia, and so on. Clearly there is no one place to stop, no one place to begin. The task is open-ended, and depends on how much the novice knows, of the extent to which he is already a master of the ways of language and of human beings. It is not possible to have a *complete explanation*, one that plugs every conceivable gap (*PI* §87: ‘The sign-post is in order—if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose’). For mostly we members of the species *homo sapiens* are already initiated into language-games; it is just this that creates the illusion of the adequacy of the

copy theory. That illusion is swiftly dispelled when we consider the various examples of linguistic deviants, who misunderstand every attempt we try at teaching them a piece of language, and consequently teach *us* how much is presupposed by even the simplest language-lessons, such as ones involving ostensive definition. All seems smooth sailing—the copy theory seems all that we need—only because we are already riding the rails of habit, practice, disposition.

If we attempt to devise a genuine explanatory theory that does not presuppose these things, we immediately tumble down the slippery slope of the rule-following problem. Unless of course the human being's experience is presupposed as involving cognition of the intended meanings, any statement of a rule can be variously interpreted consistently with a given human being's experience. And a given human being has necessarily been exposed to only a limited number of occasions in which a given rule would appropriately be invoked; in principle, the question always arises of how a statement of the rule is to be interpreted for a fresh case. Even if we or God were somehow able to read the person's mind, or indeed if the person were able to read what is in his or her own mind, such a reading still embodies interpretations—correct for the cases encountered so far, but which may diverge in other cases.

What one needs is a grasp of a rule 'that is not an interpretation' as Wittgenstein famously puts it (*PI* §201). The upshot should not be described as the necessity of a queer direct grasp of rules; it is rather that as human beings, we just do, as a matter of contingent fact, almost always go on in ways that we jointly recognise as correct. Thus at the fundamental level we 'act blindly' (*PI* §219), that is, without being guided by further rules. The agreement in concepts presupposes agreement in judgements as Wittgenstein

concisely puts it (*PI* §242); we succeed in communication because we share pre-existing dispositions. That fact in turn is due to our shared natural history, a matter for natural scientists, historians, and anthropologists to discover and explain, not philosophers (see *PI* 415, *CE* 420, *RPP* 151). The conclusion is not the impossibility of language or meaning, or scepticism about those things—'philosophy leaves everything as it is' (*PI* §124)—the conclusion is that in looking for super-hard facts or rails to infinity, we were setting the bar too high. No such thing is intelligible (*PI* §§97, 197).

It might appear that the sorts of contingent or empirical facts we have described so far do not account for the practice of using such terms as 'meaning', and thus, as it may be said, not for meaning. For to say that a person means addition by the plus sign is to say that an infinite fund of possible responses are determined as *correct*. A mere disposition cannot distinguish between a person who operates with the right rule but makes certain mistakes, and a person whose behaviour is identical to the first but operates correctly with a different rule. Meaning is normative, dispositions are not.

It is critical to the present reading of Wittgenstein that he not be supposed to advance metaphysical theses. The facts of language use are not of a radically separate order or category from the facts typically presented *in* language, even if the latter sometimes presupposes the former (this is part of what Fogelin means by Wittgenstein's 'defactoism'; 2009 pp. 28-41). Thus, when Wittgenstein says such things as 'To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* ...' (*PI* §199), he is not construing social practices as anything magical. The fact that a person grasps addition and not some deviant function in their use of '+' does not show up in the person's behaviour considered in

isolation, but simply in their susceptibility to correction should their answers misalign with those of the community. Our practice is such that the background of our community-wide language-games or 'grammar' must be in place for the particular moves to have the full significance they in fact have, but one should not read anything deeper into this; the idea is not, for example, that the activity of the community is *metaphysically necessary* for existence of language in some mysterious sense (cf. Peacocke 1981, and see McDowell 1984 p. 350).

It is a mistake to think we must close off absolutely the possibility of the *community's* failing to provide the requisite stability for sustaining normativity. Not because it is an analytic truth that the community means plus, or is always right, or anything like that. Rather, the fact that the community sets the standards for speaking of meaning addition is much like the Moon's continuing its orbit each day rather than suddenly changing course—it is as certain, although no more certain, than instances of the principles of gravitation. It's a presupposition of the language-game, not a truth of logic. Just as no one seriously and reasonably doubts that the laws of gravitation will continue unchanged, no one seriously and reasonably doubts that the community's practices will go on in a way that allows us to mean addition. The Cartesian error is to think that one's grasp of concepts—one's thinking or understanding—is impermeable in a way that ordinary knowledge of matters of fact is not. But there simply is no sublime realm of super-hard facts or rails to infinity.

Quine

I want to make it plausible that a Quinean account of certain matters is not only consistent with Wittgenstein's view, but provides it with more in the way of detailed articulation, at least in one crucial area.¹

In Quine's sense of the word, naturalism is first and foremost the view that there is no separate or higher standard of what we loosely call knowledge than empirical science. The things traditionally thought to be *a priori*—mathematics and logic—are afforded a place because they are thoroughly intermingled with empirical science; philosophy is afforded a place largely because it is concerned with the most abstract, general things that seldom arise within the work of normal practising scientists, such as the quest for the most economical and articulate formulation of science as a whole, as mentioned above. The clarity and precision that a philosopher may bring to the task will sharpen and render perspicuous the logical links in our knowledge, but it is not itself an attempt to *justify* that knowledge, and is not itself an attempt to *reduce* that knowledge to something firmer. Thus, to take a central and illuminating case, because induction is essential to almost all scientific doctrine, it must as Hume urged simply be assumed in science—but that shows not that induction is unjustifiable or doubtful, but that it enjoys the strongest empirical support. The Humean predicament is the human predicament, but the human predicament is that of the practicing scientist—not the Cartesian predicament or the sceptical predicament (see *OR* pp. 71-75; *RR* pp. 19-20; *CCE* p. 181; similarly Wittgenstein sometimes wished to think of a human being as 'an animal', *OC* 475).

Part of what unifies science is its explanatory unity, including causal unity. Roughly speaking, a discipline's scientific credentials

are measured in terms of the potency and precision of the causal relations it describes, and the extent or way in which the description dovetails with the rest of scientific doctrine.² Because a naturalistic study of language must operate within the constraint of causal efficacy with respect to its predicates, then, it is bound to be sceptical of the concepts *meaning* and *reference*. I won't go into Quine's much discussed attitude to the former, simply referring the reader to Hylton (2007 p. 226-30) and my own (2012 pp. 39-41). And for different reasons which I shall explain only briefly (see my 2012 pp. 41-5, 2010 pp. 287), Quine does not include the concept of reference in his account of language either, at least not in the sense of a substantive or explanatory relation between words and things. As a causal concept—a causal relation between words, or tokens of words, and objects, the idea is both implausible because not enough words stand for objects to which they are causally related in any interesting sense, and unworkable because of the inscrutability (or indeterminacy) of reference. The latter is for Quine fundamental. What is ultimately objective is the *structure* of our overall theory, not precisely which objects are denoted by which predicates; any scheme of reference that admits of a one to one correlation with our erstwhile preferred scheme can be substituted for it—without necessarily changing the overall domain of the theory—and the change will be equally well supported by possible evidence. Quine:

In my youth I thought of the question of existence, or what there is, as perhaps the most basic question of philosophy and science. In the fullness of time the scales fell from my eyes. Any two ontologies are equally supported by all possible data if we can express a one-to-one correlation, what I call a proxy-function, between them. (Quine CCE p. 189; see also pp. 449-60)

This does not undermine model theory or formal semantics; from an immanent point view, within our ongoing science, those activities are unaffected. Quine's claim is that from a wholesale point of view, there is no fact of the matter concerning what is the right model amongst such alternatives as he describes. Nor does it undermine naturalism (see Quine CCE pp. 316–17, 361-2). Naturalism has the corollary that, as Neurathean sailors, we are always within our theory of the world, according to which there are atoms, mammals, and galaxies. To take reference as central to one's conception of the whole world and our relation to it is to imagine a place in which our relation to those things is problematic; it is to take inscrutability as a reason to doubt that we really know our own theory, which is in turn to abandon our Neurathean ship. Quine in effect performs *modus tollens*, concluding that reference is not the key to understanding our place in the world.

Instead of reference, Quine employs the notion of a linguistic disposition, which is what, for his purposes, is the crucial aspect of use. The central idea is that of a disposition to assent to or dissent from a sentence, such as 'It's raining'. At a given moment, an individual's grasp of language and the sum-total of his theory or beliefs may be identified with the sum-total of his linguistic dispositions. Dispositions, in turn, can in principle be explained as states of the nervous system, even if such explanations remain largely unknown (see *RR* pp. 8-15; *QD* pp. 254-5). A linguistic disposition occurs as part of a causal structure, and it is only certain features of that structure that are directly relevant to the possession of scientific theory, that interest Quine. A basic distinction within this class of linguistic dispositions is that between dispositions with respect to *observation sentences* and ones with respect to *theoretical sentences*, a subset of the latter being *observation categoricals*. A sen-

tence such as 'It's windy' qualifies as an observation sentence partly by one's dispositions to assent to it being correlated with one's neural receptors being triggered in a particular way. The class of observation sentences is subsumed by the wider class of *occasion sentences* which includes sentences such as 'Interest-rates are rising', which may in principle vary in affirmation, but not systematically according to sensory stimuli. Observation sentences possess various degrees of *theoreticity*, which is the degree to which a disposition to assent or dissent from the observation sentence interacts with one's dispositions with respect to theoretical sentences (in *Word and Object* of 1960 he spoke rather of *degrees* of observationality of sentences owing to their susceptibility to 'collateral information'; see *CCE* pp. 485–92). Observation categoricals—effectively of the form 'whenever one type of observation sentence is true then so is another'—constitute the empirically testable content of a theory: to test them one waits for or brings about an instance of the one and checks for the truth of the other.

Although observationality is strictly relative to a speaker, we can define a sentence as observational for a community just in case it is observational for each member. But that much leaves unaddressed a crucial feature of observation sentences, namely that they are *shared*—a feature that makes all the difference between subjective sentences such as 'That gives me butterflies' or 'that looks red to me', and genuinely inter-subjective sentences such as 'The thermometer reads 19°' or 'It's windy'. 'It's windy' might be an observation sentence for you and for me, and therefore of the community comprising the two of us. It might be keyed to certain patterns of neural activity in me, and to certain patterns in you. But we do not literally share nervous systems; nor is it necessary for communication that we should have homologous or similar

patterns of neural activity. Therefore it remains unexplained how different people share a language, how they communicate, and learn from others.

The problem is crucial for Quine; if he were simply to shift the focus from Cartesian privacy to neurological privacy, it would remain mysterious how it can be case that 'language is a *social art*' (*WO* p. ix; emphasis added). It continued to vex Quine for more than twenty years after the publication of *Word and Object*, until the 1980's and 90's when he gradually settled upon his solution (definitively in *From Stimulus to Science* 1995). Quine first makes use of his earlier definition, in *The Roots of Reference* (1974), of the notion of perceptual similarity for the individual. The individual's total neural intake on an occasion is the temporally ordered set of all firings of his sensory nerves on that occasion; *receptual* similarity is simply the degree of overlap among intakes. Individual *perceptual* similarity, then, is measured by similarity of response amongst two such occasions. To take Quine's example, suppose a chicken has peradventure learned to get fed a pellet of food by pressing lever C, and is now faced with levers A and B (but not C). If the chicken presses one lever rather than the other, then that lever is more similar for the chicken to C than the other one is (*RR* pp. 15-18). It is vital—requisite for any learning—that some such propensities must be prewired or innate (see *SS* pp. 19-25, and 'Three Networks: Similarity, Implication and Membership', in *CCE* pp. 493–5; see also 'The Innate Foundational Endowments' *CCE* pp.176-81 for more expansive thoughts).

Next, Quine tells us what it is for two creatures to share standards of perceptual similarity: the degree to which our perceptual standards are shared is the degree to which an arbitrary situation at different times produces neural events in me that are similar

and likewise produces neural events that are similar in you (see Hylton p. 126). Likewise, we can be said to share our responses—the crucial example being verbal dispositions towards observation sentences—just insofar as we share similar responses to our individual neural events that are instances classed as similar by the standard just sketched. The explanation for this ‘pre-established intersubjective harmony’ of standards of perceptual similarity appeals to natural selection: the more our ancestors’ standards of perceptual similarity correlated with the environment, the more they tended to procreate successfully. Since we do inhabit similar environments, we all come to it neurologically equipped to solve the same sorts of problems, despite our anatomical differences (it is, I think, because he underestimates the fine-grained power of this that McDowell passes off such ideas as insufficient for genuine linguistic communities to arise; see McDowell 1984 pp. 347-51).

The rest of theoretically significant language is of course exceedingly complicated, much too much so to go into here. In particular, no account of a full-blown language can be complete without an account of how it is that reference, or rather *referential structure*, fits in. As we know from logic-books, reference to objects need not come in with names and predicates, but only with quantifiers and variables.³ And according to Quine, there are further structural conditions that must be met before a creature can be said to have completely mastered referential language: criteria of identity, and what he calls the focal observation categorical. But Quine's point is simply that such a creature can be said to have mastered referential language; nothing else is required. He is not saying that such a creature thereby enacts a further mind-world

relation that must play a part in a causal-explanatory account of language.

The Similarity Summarised and Qualified

At the heart of both Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and Quine's, according to the preceding, are the essentials of linguistic naturalism. Wittgenstein himself did not advertise it as such; he was sceptical about the supposed causal structure of the mind, and perhaps more generally of physicalism. Nevertheless, at the root of the capacity for language according to both figures are certain basic dispositions, whether or not they are ultimately explicable neurologically. Wittgenstein, as we say, espouses a distal or long-armed notion of the relevant dispositions, whereas Quine stays resolutely proximal, but with his notion of pre-established intersubjective harmony Quine re-establishes a link to the outer environment.

In calling them basic I just mean that from the point of view of language they might as well be unexplained; the point is that they are not anything rationally or normatively assessable in themselves, and do not involve anything essentially linguistic such as reference. If language has anything like a necessary foundation, something that all languages presuppose, this is it. At the simplest, it is the stuff of Pavlov, except that at least some of it must be innate, and as just explained the social dimension is vital—for Quine it is the key to observationality, for Wittgenstein it is so that talk of normativity can get a grip.⁴

Both Quine and Wittgenstein were interested in how the underlying dispositions can be coached, trained and guided, but Quine's concern with the structure of the dispositions themselves

was not shared by Wittgenstein, who preferred to point out the various places at which the best one can say as a philosopher is 'this is simply what I do' (*PI* §217), or 'this language-game is played' (*PI* §654)—although he does sometimes attribute it to the 'natural history' of human beings (*PI* §415, Part II xii).⁵ And whereas Quine concentrates on an exact characterisation of the simplest dispositions underlying the capacity for observation sentences as illustrated by the chicken, Wittgenstein casts his net more widely over the vast range of language-games, trying to lay bare the multitudinous points of philosophical confusion, to illustrate how they arise, to arrive at the points at which one's philosophical spade is turned (*PI* §217). As pointed out at the beginning, what I have said is consistent with this being a matter of emphasis, of different interests, rather than a genuine disagreement.

Canfield on Notions of Use

John Canfield (1996) expresses criticisms of Quine that are, I think, widely shared among those sympathetic to Wittgenstein: There is something about the organic, interconnected nature of actual language, as illustrated by Wittgensteinian language-games, that Quine, despite his famous holism, cannot account for. In particular, Canfield claims that in so restricting the account of use to dispositions to assent to observation sentences or dissent from them, Quine illegitimately cuts them off from the other language-games, connections which according to Wittgenstein are essential for their functioning:

Words...have a variety of functions corresponding to the variety of the proto and simple language-games and their subsequent extensions. The march from childhood to adult language involves a pro-

gressive complication, extension and intertwining of the earliest, foundational language-games. Science must be conceived as growing piecemeal out of that enriched set of language-games. It is not one thing, but a collection of different language-games joined at best by family resemblance. (1996 pp.132-3)

This complaint is similar to what Austin described as the 'descriptive fallacy' (Austin 1979 p. 103). The necessary intertwining of language with basic and non-basic human action takes many forms, including requests, statements of intention, greeting, refusal, make believe, claims of possession, utterances of fear, surprise, delight. This necessity is one that Quine overlooks—his writing contains little about how observation sentences are interwoven with practice generally—and thus Quine's conception of use is quite antithetical to Wittgenstein's. Quine writes as if observation sentences are learned independently of other language-games, when in fact all or most of those language-games must be learned together.

I think that Canfield is mistaken in charging Quine with having made a false abstraction. Whereas Wittgenstein is indeed concerned with almost the whole complex phenomenon of human language, Quine is interested in only a very limited part of it. And only a human being who has mastered the whole of language, or a lot of it, can be a complete master of the 'affirmative' part, the part Quine is interested in. With that much, we can grant that Canfield is right. Nevertheless, the most that Quine could be charged with is that his account is incomplete as account of actual human language, rather than misconceived from the beginning. We can think of Quine as fixating on one *aspect* of language-use; or better, he is to be understood as *dividing through* the sum total of language-use with the concept of observation sentence, to yield the part most

relevant to science. And even if, in the nature of the case, we never find absolutely pure samples of a certain element or force in nature, does not mean that the concept of that element or force is illegitimate. Idealisation cuts off corners, falsely pretends things are absolutely smooth rather than rough, but is not thereby mistaken. Nature is irreducibly complex, human neurology especially, but there is nothing inaccurate about dividing up the concepts in terms of which we describe it (for Quine's comments on this issue, see *CCE* p. 248; cf. Hacker 1996b p. 219-20).

Canfield also finds fault with Quine's conception of observation sentences, finding no place in Quine's scheme for first-person statements of intention or desire:

When I say that I intend to go upstairs, I do not do so on the basis of observing my own behaviour.... In general I do not base my first-person psychological utterances on the basis of my exteroceptors. So ... Quine must change his definition of observation sentences; those fundamental sentences cannot be restricted to noises correlated with sensory stimuli. (1996 pp. 137)

But again, there is no such pressure to change the definition. According to Quine's scheme, such utterances are definitely not observation sentences because they are not intersubjective; they are however examples of the more inclusive class of *occasion sentences*—ones that vary in truth-value. Other examples of non-observation occasion sentences include ones without any systematic correlation with the senses but which are straightforwardly testable—'Interest rates are rising' to take an earlier example—and ones which are, as we say, subjective, as in 'I've got butterflies', to take another. Presumably statements about intention and desire would have to be explained in terms of neurology—the neural

correlates of action and imagination, of the satisfaction or frustration of desire and intention, and so on. Quine said little about the utterances that worry Canfield, presumably because Quine believes that they bear only indirectly on the central project of laying out the main points of the leanest statement of scientific doctrine. Quine may have been wrong about this, or perhaps a more *complete* account of science would have to deal with them, but given what I said in the last paragraph, any difficulties they present are not fundamental.

Normativity, Holism, and Hacker

The gist of the position represented by Hacker is that Wittgenstein insists on something Quine rejects, namely a fundamental divide between ordinary statements of fact and statements which characterise language-games, which set forth points of what Wittgenstein calls grammar. There are, according to Hacker, certain extra-logical statements that characterise language-games that play an absolutely and categorically separate role from ordinary statements within the language-game, acceptance of which is a precondition for a full understanding those ordinary statements. I think the matter is much less clear cut that Hacker makes out.

What Wittgenstein precisely meant by 'grammatical propositions', 'criteria', and 'hinge propositions', is the subject of much literature. The notions are subtler, more rarefied, more complicated, and more flexible than the idea of analyticity, even where the latter is expanded to include examples like 'May comes immediately after April'—ones that are not derivable from truths of logic simply by substituting synonyms (as 'Bachelors are unmarried men' is got from the logical truth 'Unmarried men are unmar-

ried men' by substituting an occurrence of 'Bachelors' for its synonym 'unmarried men'). But I will take it as established that the decision to use a declarative sentence as 'grammatical' or similar is a pragmatic or contextual matter—that is, it is to some extent relative to one's purposes of the moment, to what one is going to do with it, the extent of background knowledge assumed. This understanding, restricted to criteria—though I assume it can be extended to the others—has recently been promoted by Eric Loomis (2010; see also Hacker 1996b pp. 212-4, Fogelin 2009 pp. 72-7, and Gibson 1996 pp. 92-5, in which Gibson approves the reading of Wittgenstein as a 'relative foundationalist'). So for example if one says that accepting 'Bodies have mass' is *critical* for *understanding*—part of the skeleton underlying the relevant language-game rather than a piece of ordinary knowledge—we are tacitly assuming certain contexts in which someone might say it, as in an elementary science class where the term 'body' is introduced; but in other contexts—say a pub challenge to name a property that all bodies have—the case is otherwise. The fact that a sentence is normally used as a criterion does not establish that a use of it as stating an ordinary fact cannot be cited or imagined. Wittgenstein often makes a comparison with board games and the like, as if a statement of a grammatical proposition were exactly like reading out a rule written down or otherwise explicitly formulated. But of course, as Wittgenstein acknowledged, when it comes to language-games there are no rules in that sense (cf. *PI* §§83-4), and the boundary between rule and ordinary statement is fluid if often important (see *OC* 97-99; cf. Quine *CCE* p. 297).

Still, all this is consistent with what in any case seems evident, that despite this fluidity and context-relativity, Wittgenstein accepted a distinction between the normative and non-normative,

and in particular between *statements*—as opposed to declarative sentences—that so to speak set the rules of a given language-game, and moves within the language-game. Indeed philosophy, if it is any one thing, is concerned specifically with mapping out the subtleties of the former sort; it is concerned with language-games, the normative, with features of the understanding, rather than ordinary facts.

Nevertheless I don't think that these two philosophers are so far apart on this issue as one might think. Before addressing Hacker's claims specifically, there are two, connected points to make.

The first point is that, contrary perhaps to popular belief, Quine's naturalism explicitly embraces normativity. Indeed, naturalized epistemology claims that there are no *standards* for knowledge, or for *responsible* belief or theory, other than those operative within natural science. And that is claim about the character of norms. The idea goes back to the 'Two Dogmas' [1951] idea that the standards for belief-revision are holistic (Quine 2000 pp. 411, 412). In later writings—the books *The Roots of Reference*, *Pursuit of Truth*, *From Stimulus to Science*, and various essays—Quine explicitly speaks of normative claims such as the 'norm of empiricism'. In an essay of 1995, he wrote:

Naturalistic epistemology...is viewed by Henri Lauener and others as purely descriptive. I disagree. Just as traditional epistemology on its speculative side gets naturalized into science...so on its normative side it gets naturalized into technology, the technology of scientizing. (*CCE* p. 468)

The question then is whether Quine can allow the *particular* normative claims that Wittgenstein insists on, the normative dimen-

sion of language-games, of grammatical propositions. I think there is no reason that Quine cannot do so, as will presently emerge.

The second point is largely to reiterate the lesson made at the end of the section on Wittgenstein, and to connect it with Quine. I said that resistance to my favoured account of Wittgenstein on rule-following is due at least in part to an indefatigable temptation to believe in hyper-certainty with respect to the conceptual realm, or to thought, or to the contents of one's mind—for something that remains the case whatever happens in the world or experience. It's possible that that longing will not ever go away; but if I'm right, then it is a centrepiece of the linguistic naturalism shared by Quine and Wittgenstein that however firmly entrenched the allegiance may be, it is, in the end, merely superstitious. An appeal to the community is important for describing how normativity is actually generated and why it is social, but it does not change the ultimate contingency of the facts underlying language. Especially where extremely general and fundamental propositions are concerned, deriving the normative from the descriptive—or the categorical imperative from the hypothetical imperative, or the 'ought' from the 'is' —is, in the final analysis, simply what we do; it is not a matter of logic or following some more basic principle, but a feature of our practice. This is a hallmark of naturalism.

So both Wittgenstein and Quine accept that our grasp of language does not depend on anything preternaturally stable. Now Wittgenstein's view is precisely that the understanding is to be described not in terms of *facts* but in terms of *rules*, the rules of language-games or grammatical propositions. Thus Hacker writes:

What is marked by the 'must' of 'If it is red, then it must be coloured', 'If there are ten Xs in each of ten rows, then there must be a hundred', 'If it is red, then it must be darker than pink' is the normative role of

such propositions as 'Red is a colour', 'Red is darker than pink', '10 × 10 = 100' —they are rules, 'norms of representation' or 'norms of description'. 'Red is a colour' does not 'owe its truth' to red's being a colour in the sense in which 'Some dogs are white' owes its truth to the fact that some dogs are white (or to some dogs' being white). Its being true consists in its being an expression of a rule for the use its constituent expressions 'red' and 'colour'...(1996a pp. 21-2)

And:

From the point of view of a normative (rule-governed) conception of meaning and language such as Wittgenstein defends, a behaviourist conception like Quine's is simply no conception of meaning at all, not even an ersatz one. Indeed, it is no conception of *language*, for a language stripped of normativity is no more a language than chess stripped of its rules is a game (1996b p. 211).

In view of what I have just said, I think the implied difference from Quine is itself merely a rhetorical difference, a difference in words rather than substance (compare the following points with those in Hookway 1996, especially pp. 71-5). We can either speak indifferently of all true declarative statements as 'stating facts', or we can reserve the appellation for those truths which do not serve to express rules for the use of their constituent expressions. One can speak as one likes. The substantive question is whether Quine can allow the existence of linguistic acts which do serve to express rules for the use of their constituent expressions. Of course the presence of the word 'rule' might put Quine off, but it is undoubtedly true that he did come to recognise the existence of linguistic acts whose purpose is to *teach* the use of expressions, or to illustrate points of correct usage. Earlier on (1963), in the essay 'Necessary Truth', he thought of attributions of necessity to state-

ments—by which especially at that time he meant *epistemic* or *linguistic* necessity—as pragmatic, tantamount to ‘For present purposes, it shall not be questioned whether ...’ (WP pp. 68-76). More to the point, in a late piece he writes:

It is intelligible and often useful in discussion to point out that some disagreement is purely a matter of words than of fact.... I proposed a rough theoretical definition of analyticity to fit these familiar sorts of cases. A sentence is analytic for a native speaker, I suggested, if he learned the truth of the sentence by learning the use of one or more of its words. (CCE pp. 395-6; see also RR pp. 78-80)

Presumably the account applies not just analytic statements traditionally so-called—which are rather rare—but to criteria and so on. As will I hope be evident, the point is not at all that far away from Hacker's characterization of Wittgenstein. Quine can go along with the characterisation of such lessons as lessons of ‘grammar’, as unsubstantive points of the use of language—even if, ‘legalistically’ as Quine would put it later (CCE p. 393), their ultimate justification is the same sort of thing as for any sentence, holistically via its role in the web. And thus, crucially, Quine can allow that certain statements function to ‘set up the game’, as ones that normally have to be assumed between people in order to begin talking, as ones that are not normally called into question, at least at the initial stages of talking. What he objects to, as was expressed in the ‘Two Dogmas’ claim that the status of sentence as a definition is only a feature of the historical act of definition rather than the sentence itself, is to think of such roles as being stamped on a sentence for all time, irrespective of point of view. But that is exactly what Wittgenstein accepts, as explained in the second paragraph of this section in connection with Loomis. And it is not

all clear, given the way I've set up Wittgenstein's view of rule-following, what else could possibly make for the purported difference between Quine and Wittgenstein as regards the normative. Thus Quine can go along with the proposition that understanding is normative in Wittgenstein's sense, even it is true that he did not emphasise the point as Wittgenstein did.

Earlier I emphasised Wittgenstein's point that to follow a rule, in the most basic sense, is not to interpret anything, and not in particular to interpret the rule itself. So understanding is not interpretation. Hacker (1996b pp. 219-20, 1996b p. 27) and others, including Blackburn (1984 pp. 57-67) and Glock (2003 pp. 175-82; 202-3), mistakenly characterise Quine as holding that all understanding involves *translation*, even if only translation of the homophonic variety, that is, translation of a sentence as itself. Interpretation is not the same as translation, but Quine regards interpretation as merely the translation into a language that one already understands. So understanding a sentence of one's own language appears to involve either a vicious regress or a spurious epicycle of translation of the sentence as itself. Such would indeed be an absurd view, but Quine definitely did not hold it. To ‘acquiesce in one's own tongue’, as Quine puts it, is simply to operate with one's language, to speak and understand one's language. And what I described above in terms of types of interconnected linguistic dispositions is precisely what understanding consists of, not anything about translation. Contra Hacker, Quine agrees with Wittgenstein: understanding one's own language is neither interpretation nor translation. And this is why I made the point early on that translation or interpretation is not essential to Quine's overall picture: one's ability with language is not one's ability to undertake radical translation, but the possession of a structure of

linguistic dispositions (this is of course a shallow analysis, but that doesn't make it incorrect). And that is why Quine would come, in his last years, to content himself with the idea that the indeterminacy of translation is 'conjecture, albeit a plausible one' (Quine 2000 p.409). So long as Quine's basic outlook on language is assumed, then if the conjecture somehow proved false, so that propositions or sentential meanings were definable as equivalence classes of sentences under the relation *S and S* are correct translations of each other*, those would in Quine's view be mere spandrels, a happy artefact of the uniquely correct translation of one system of linguistic dispositions in terms of another (see Hylton pp. 221, 225-30; and Kemp pp. 39-41). The explanatory direction would remain the same, as running from linguistic dispositions to sentential meaning, not the other way round.

Hacker does point out that whereas for Quine, "what are 'given' to the field linguist are surface irritations and responses", for the Wittgensteinian field linguist 'what are given are human forms of life, to be characterized intentionalistically' (1996b p. 220). But again, it's a matter of different purposes, not a disagreement about the data given at the outset of some task that Quine and Wittgenstein are equally concerned with. Quine's aim is to cut through forms of life to find the assertoric part of language, whereas Wittgenstein believes that, roughly speaking, one cannot fully understand the native without stepping into native forms of life, in all their bewildering variety. They can both be right (which is not to say that Quine's aim is not chimerical, or for that matter that what Wittgenstein describes is too close to relativism, or is too vague to be of much use).

Concluding Remarks

The doctrine of linguistic naturalism can be developed in two different but compatible ways. What Wittgenstein pronounces can be understood so as to fit Quine's position, which any case is not so antithetical to Wittgenstein as is sometimes imagined. What Quine does not discuss can be supplied by Wittgenstein.⁶ Quine is not especially interested in the ins and outs of the myriad varieties of philosophical confusion, if not utterly blind to them as sometimes alleged. He is concerned only with that aspect of language-use that is necessary for science, and his conclusions are strikingly austere: we do not need meaning, reference, irreducibly mental entities, necessity, universals or properties, and we do not need to go beyond a few simple types of linguistic dispositions as discussed earlier. A photograph of actual human language would seem to show it as crowded with these things and more, but Quine thinks that none of these things is strictly necessary for the expression of scientific theory, indeed that a commitment to them amongst philosophers is sometimes merely lazy or confused. The actual, crowded and often confused picture is precisely what motivates Wittgenstein—not to refute the picture, but to diagnose and overcome, from within, the confusion it generates. Nevertheless, what unites them in forming an alternative to the mainstream theories of meaning is a deep commonality, what I have called linguistic naturalism, the view that language is best conceived in terms of linguistic dispositions, not meaning.

But there are, of course, differences between the two figures, some of them arguably fundamental. I have played up the similarity, but one might still remain unmoved by the above, and insist that Quine's holism—even with the qualification that some sentences are *in practice* irreviseable—sits uneasily with Wittgenstein's

insistence on the philosophical centrality of grammar, his insistence that that is philosophy's only concern, not facts; after all, Wittgenstein famously said that 'our considerations could not be scientific ones' (*PI* §109; see Marconi 2010 for more on this theme). Or that Quine's extensionalism sits uneasily with Wittgenstein's insistence that understanding requires a grasp of forms of life, which seem to require intentional characterisation (though Hacker, in my view, is wrong to charge Quine with illicitly helping himself to intentionality in the notion of assent; see Hacker 1996b p. 218; cf. *CCE* p. 248). Or perhaps one would claim that Quine's vision of the most economical formulation of the whole of science would have simply struck Wittgenstein not only as egregiously scientific, but as deeply confused, or as a crude response to life and the world.⁷ Quine's approach inevitably involves invidious distinctions—to indulge a Quinean turn of phrase—that will surely grate against many people schooled in Wittgenstein. But I'm not convinced that the apparent conflict is not more rhetorical than real, a matter of words rather than substance.

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Notes

¹ This follows myself, Kemp (2012) pp. 15-64.

² There is a lot hidden in this point; for Quine is essentially a Humean about causation (Hume of the first definition); explicit causal terminology is in principle dispensable in favour of ordinary universal generalisations. See 'The Scope and Language of Science' (in *WP* pp. 228-45), especially p. 242.

³ Actually, according to Quine's 1960 'Variables Explained Away' (*SLP* 227-35) and *SS* pp. 33-5, 101-5, an adequate logic—the logic of predicate functors—can be developed without any singular terms at all, not even variables. To be, under this logic, is not to be the value of variable, but is to be denoted by some predicate or other.

⁴ One person who has argued something similar is Jónsson (2000). However, Jónsson's claim is that *Kripke's* Wittgenstein is not antithetical to Quine, partly because of what Quine says about radical translation.

⁵ Wittgenstein famously characterises the teaching of a child to say 'That hurts!', rather than crying out, as teaching new forms of pain-behaviour. Quine describes the learning of 'Red!' or 'Mama!' similarly, likening the accomplishment to the case of ape cries which warn of the presence of an intruder. Both Wittgenstein's and Quine's examples are cases of holophrastic learning—to be thought of in the initial stages as the learning of whole sentences in certain circumstances (so 'Red!' is regarded as equivalent from the adult point of view to 'That's red'). Equally there need be no awareness, at this initial stage, of correctness, of truth and falsity, of normativity; although of course the capacity for it is in some sense incipient at this early stage, its mastery belongs to a more sophisticated phase of linguistic accomplishment.

⁶ I thank an editor for the preceding three sentences.

⁷ Another theme which I have touched on connection with Quine but otherwise have left out of the discussion is their respective views on ontology, on what there is. The topic is too enormous and complicated. But briefly: as we saw, for strict science Quine thinks that ontological questions are not very important, as he accepts many if not all lessons pointing to structuralism; for ordinary language, Quine thinks in addition that ontological questions scarcely get a grip, the language being so slipshod (see 'The Scope of the Language of Science', in *WP* pp. 228-45). Only with regimented language adequate for all science is the ontological question sharpened; the question is always: what *objects*, what *referents* to (first-order) variables, are there? In his later period, Wittgenstein never asks that question in its full generality, but since he sticks resolutely to ordinary language, I take it that from that point of view the question will look as if it already grants a lot nonsense (as is evident in his writing on the foundations of mathematics). Perhaps he felt that to ask it is to submit to the craving for generality, summed up the idea that *existence* is univocal. Or that one may ask for a regimented reckoning in the way that Quine describes, but without evident point (not all uses of formal languages or 'calculi' are useful objects of comparison; *PI* §81).

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