

Husserl, Dummett, and the Linguistic Turn

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Abstract:

Michael Dummett famously holds that the “philosophy of thought” must proceed via the philosophy of language, since that is the only way to preserve the objectivity of thoughts while avoiding commitments to “mythological,” Platonic entities. Central to Dummett’s case is his thesis that all thought contents are linguistically expressible. In this paper, I will (a) argue that making the linguistic turn is neither necessary nor sufficient to avoid the problems of psychologism, (b) discuss Wayne Martin’s argument that not all thought-contents are linguistically communicable, and (c) present another, stronger argument, derived from Husserl’s early account of fulfillment, that establishes the same conclusion.

Michael Dummett’s criticism of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological approach to the “philosophy of thought” has been widely discussed and criticized. (Martin, 1999; Parsons, 2000; Smith, 1989) In the present essay, I will attempt to provide additional reasons for preferring Husserl’s phenomenological approach to thought over Dummett’s linguistic approach, reasons that, in my opinion, are more compelling than those yet presented in the literature.

According to Dummett, “What distinguishes analytical philosophy... from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 4) As a characterization of analytic philosophy, this is far from satisfactory,

but it is clear that many philosophers, including many of the leading lights within the analytic tradition, have endorsed something like this thesis. It is equally clear, I think, that Husserl did not, and that this claim is antithetical to the phenomenological approach to consciousness, thought, and knowledge. This is not just because, on a Husserlian view, the intentionality of mental acts is explanatorily and ontologically prior to the intentionality of linguistic signs. Nor is it simply because Husserl, unlike Dummett and Wittgenstein, held that there are acts of thinking, understanding, and cognizing—a thesis whose denial I have, frankly, never quite been able even to make sense of, and so will not criticize here. It is, rather, principally because if Dummett’s claim is correct, a further Dummettian thesis, which Husserl undeniably rejects, must be true, namely that “It is of the essence of thought, not merely to be communicable, but to be communicable, *without residue*, by means of language.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 261) I am not altogether confident that this, if true, is sufficient to support the claim that a theory of thought must proceed via a theory of language. But I think it’s fairly obviously necessary. If there are some thoughts or thought contents that are not communicable by means of language, and if a philosophical account of language must confine itself to the examination of contents which are thus communicable, then an account of language cannot succeed as a comprehensive account of thinking or thought.

In this paper, I will examine two arguments against the Communicability Thesis, one due to Wayne Martin, and one easily extracted from Husserl’s theory of intentionality in the *Logical Investigations*. I choose to focus on this account for several reasons. The first, which I cannot defend here, is that I think it is more philosophically satisfactory than his later, noema-centered account, an account whose central notion continues to perplex Husserl’s commentators, and with good reason. Insofar as my principal purpose here is to establish a philosophical claim, rather

than trace the rich and tangled historical development of Husserl's thought, I have chosen to focus on that period in his development in which he offers the most promising account of thought and intentionality. The second is that this account is not susceptible to one of Dummett's main complaints against Husserl, namely that he mistakenly generalizes the notion of sense (*Sinn*) to all acts of consciousness. Before doing so, however, I will consider a line of thinking that might make the linguistic turn seem mandatory, namely that thoughts and their contents must be objective if we psychologism is to be avoided. I will argue that making the linguistic turn is neither necessary nor sufficient to avoid psychologism, and that any naturalistic linguistic turn is susceptible to the most damning objections that Husserl lodged against psychologism.

I.

The Communicability Thesis can be stated in terms of the *contents* of thoughts as follows:

(CT): For any content of thought *C*, *C* is communicable by means of language.

Just what does that mean? For starters, just what sorts of things *are* contents? To the enormous detriment of anyone attempting to achieve clarity on fundamental questions in the philosophy of thought, the term 'content' is used, often by a single author, as a catch-all term for just anything that is related to the mind in whatever fashion. Christopher Peacocke, for instance, says,

Henceforth I use the phrase "the content of experience" to cover not only which objects, properties and relations are perceived, but also the ways in which they are perceived.¹

¹ Peacocke, 2001, p. 241. For a telling indication of the unruliness of the term 'content' in contemporary philosophy, check out Chalmers, 2006.

So, when I perceive a tree, Peacocke would like me to apply the term ‘content’ to both the tree and the way in which the tree is perceived, despite the fact that these two things share very few of their salient properties, and despite the fact that the two are related in manifestly different ways to my act of perceiving the tree. The tree has bark, and my experience is of or about it; the way in which the tree is perceived does not have bark, and my experience, though related to it *somehow*, is not about it.

Throughout what follows, I will follow the Husserlian tradition and most contemporary authors by understanding contents to be bearers of intentionality or aboutness. Such things as propositions, for instance, are contents, since they represent the world as being a certain way. So are the constituents of propositions, namely concepts or Fregean senses. Such things as trees and states of affairs, on the other hand, though obviously among the objects of thought and discourse, are not bearers of intentionality, and so are not and cannot function as contents in the sense in which I mean them. And I will follow Husserl in holding that the content of a cognitive act or state is that feature in virtue of which that act is directed upon its object in the determinate manner that it is. Insofar as that feature in virtue of which an act is directed upon its object is not something that we invariably think about, and in fact is something that, while performing an act, precisely do not think about, the content of an act is not, in most (all?) cases, that which the act is about. My belief that my office is messy has as its content the proposition that my office is messy. But my belief is not about a proposition, since my belief is about the very same thing that the proposition itself is about, and the proposition is not about itself or any other proposition.

One broadly recognized feature of contents, thus construed, are that they bear an intimate relationship with individual psychological episodes. Indeed, individual mental states have, or at least seem to have, many of the same properties that their contents have. My belief, both in the

dispositional and occurrent sense of ‘belief’, that Socrates is wise itself has the same truth value as, and bears the same logical relations to other propositions as, the proposition itself. Another widely recognized feature of contents is their objectivity; despite their psychological intimacy, contents are objective in the sense that they can serve as the contents of many numerically distinct psychological episodes. When you and I agree that snow is white, what we believe is the very same thing. Both Husserl and Frege regard such entities as objective in all of the following senses as well: (i) neither their existence, properties, nor the laws pertaining to them depend upon our or anyone else’s psychological constitution; (ii) they exist independently of serving as the content of any mental state; and (iii) they are ideal or “non-actual” entities, neither mental nor physical, occupying an “ideal sphere” or “third realm.” (See Frege, 1893, p. 204) As such, Husserl, again like Frege, rejects logical psychologism. Although psychologism is a difficult position to pin down, I will understand psychologism to be the thesis that individual psychological episodes of thinking, judging, inferring, and so forth both (a) are the truth-makers for and (b) constitute the evidential basis of our knowledge of propositions concerning contents and the logical laws governing them.²

To that extend, Husserl and Frege “extruded” thoughts from the mind, a move which, according to Dummett, enables us to carve the philosophy or thought off from the philosophy of mind. Dummett also argues, however, that Frege’s and Husserl’s third-realm ontology is a piece of philosophical mythology. Making the linguistic turn preserves the objectivity of contents while avoiding ontological mythology by locating meanings outside the mind but firmly in the spatio-temporal world. (See Dummett, 1994, p. 25)

² “Logical Psychologism is the view that the non-normative statements made by logicians are about, and draw their evidence from the examination of, the particular conceivings, assertings, and inferrings of particular persons – a range of facts commonly thought to belong to the science of psychology alone.” (Willard, 1977, p. 10)

This mythology served Frege and Husserl as a bulwark against... psychologism... If, now, our capacity for thought is equated with, or at least explained in terms of, our ability to use language, no such bulwark is required: for language is a social phenomenon, in no way private to the individual, and its use is publicly observable. (Dummett, 1994, p. 131)

Husserl fails to make such a turn, according to Dummett, because in the period between the publication of his *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, he generalizes the notion of sense to all mental acts: “Something like sense... must inform every mental act; not merely those involving linguistic expression or capable of linguistic expression, but acts of sensory perception, for example.”³ As such, after putting forward a resolutely anti-psychologistic position in the *Logical Investigations*, in his later works Husserl is guilty of a sort of relapse into psychologism or, at the very least, “something rather hard to distinguish from psychologism.” (Dummett, 1981, p. 56)

Dummett is, I believe, mistaken on several counts. In the first place, it is entirely consistent to hold that contents are objective in all of the ways in which Husserl and Frege held them to be, while also intimately related to individual acts of thinking, judging, and so forth. It is incumbent upon any theory of thought to make the psychological intimacy of contents intelligible. Frege, notoriously, does virtually nothing to explain the relation between contents and psychological acts, beyond saying that it is “the most mysterious of all.”⁴ (Frege, 1906, p. 246) He does at least give this relation a name: thinking is a matter of “grasping” thoughts. This strongly suggests thoughts or propositions are, in all cases, among the objects of acts of thinking. Certainly many within the analytic tradition have assumed so. John Perry, for instance, says that the first tenet of the “doctrine of propositions” is that belief is a “relation between a subject and

³ Dummett, 1994, pp. 26-7. For more on this thesis, see Follesdal, 1969, and Smith and McIntyre, 1982, p. 183. See also Husserl, *Ideas I*, sec. 124.

⁴ Frege, 1906, p. 246. Robert Hanna writes that “Frege’s extreme anti-psychologism so effectively banishes the mind from the theory of meaning and logic that it becomes virtually impossible to understand how logical propositions can ever actually take on direct relations to logical thinkers.” (Hanna, 1993, p. 253. See also Willard, 1994)

an object,” and that the sorts of objects in question are propositions. (Perry, 1979, p. 6) And it might be thought that such an account is required if we are to uphold the objectivity of contents. For acts of thinking, after all, are not shareable; *you* cannot have *my* belief. Whatever is objective must, it seems, be placed on the object side of the act-object intentional nexus. Russell seems to have come to such a conclusion on the basis of this thoroughly Fregean-sounding argument:

One man’s act of thought is necessarily a different thing from another man’s; one man’s act of thought at one time is necessarily a different thing from the same man’s act of thought at another time. Hence, if whiteness were the thought as opposed to its object, no two different men could think of it, and no one man could think of it twice. That which many different thoughts of whiteness have in common is their object, and this object is different from all of them. (Russell, 1999, p. 71)

But there is *another* feature that distinct thoughts of whiteness have in common besides whiteness: the property of being *of* or *about whiteness*. But this property is not itself whiteness, since the things that have it need not be white, and the things which have the property of whiteness need not be of or about anything at all. If there were no such property, there would be no thoughts of whiteness, and if it were not a shareable, and to that extent objective, property, then only one thought could ever succeed in being of whiteness.

With respect to Frege’s view, the same point holds: the acts wherein senses are “grasped” must have something objective in common in addition to their senses, namely the property of grasping those senses. My grasping of a sense *S* has a property in common with yours, namely, that of being *of S*. Frege is, to be sure, right to insist that “It is so much of the essence of each of my ideas to be the content of my consciousness, that every idea of another person is, just as such, distinct from mine.” (Frege, 1918, p. 525) But could this possibly be false of individual

graspings of thoughts and senses? *Of course* every particular “idea” is numerically distinct from every other; like my fingers or my bank account, each of my ideas is mine. But, just like my fingers and my bank account, my ideas instantiate properties that are common to many things that are not mine.

Husserl, who clearly realizes this, dispenses with “graspings” and locates senses, concepts and propositions “in” the mind, not as parts or constituents, nor as objects, but as properties. A particular act of meaning something is related to its objective content in the same way that a particular instance of redness is related to the shareable property of redness:

The manifold singulars for the ideal unity Meaning are naturally the corresponding act-moments of meaning, the *meaning-intentions*. Meaning is related to varied acts of meaning... just as Redness *in specie* is to the slips of paper which lie here, and which all ‘have’ the same redness.
(LI II, 32, p. 330)

On Husserl’s view, contents are *intentional properties*, properties which determine or partially determine the specific intentionality of an act, and which bestow on an act various properties of the content itself, including its truth value, if it has one.

According to Husserl’s account in the *Logical Investigations*, every intentional experience consists of two inseparable but independently variable part-moments, a matter and a quality. Husserl defines the matter as “that element in an act which first gives it reference to an object, and reference so wholly definite that it not merely fixes the object meant in a general way, but also the precise way in which it is meant.” (LI V, sec. 20, p. 589) The Ideal property instantiated in the matter of an act is a *sense* or proposition. Another feature shared by all intentional experiences or mental acts is a quality – a mental analogue of Frege’s assertoric force – which Husserl defines as “the general act-character, which stamps an act as merely presentative, judgemental, emotional, desiderative, etc.” (LI V, sec. 20, p. 586) The union of the

matter and the quality of an act Husserl calls its “intentional” or “semantic essence.” Meanings – the sorts of contents that are expressed in assertions, questions, commands, wishes, and so forth – are “ideational abstractions” of an act’s semantic essence. (*LI V*, sec. 21, p. 590) And all of these properties, like many other mental and non-mental properties, are susceptible to a priori investigation.

It should be clear that Husserl’s account is perfectly consistent with his and Frege’s insistence that contents are objective in all of the senses discussed earlier. That contents are instantiated in particular mental acts does not exclude their being shareable, ontologically independent of our psychological constitutions or any particular mental acts whose contents they are, and ideal or non-actual. Fodor, who may or may not be aware of the similarities between his and Husserl’s account, expresses this point with characteristic clarity:

...[T]o claim that MOPs [modes of presentation or senses] must be *mental* objects is quite compatible with also claiming that they are *abstract* objects, and that abstract objects are *not* mental. The apparent tension is reconciled by taking MOPS-qua-things-in-the-head to be the tokens of which MOPS-qua-abstract-objects are the types. (Fodor, 1998, p. 20)

Holding such a view does not, moreover, commit one to logical psychologism. It in no way follows from Husserl’s (or Fodor’s) position that psychological states are either the truth-makers of logical propositions, or the evidential basis of our knowledge of them. Just as the fact that the instances of geometrical types are physical entities does not entail that geometry is a branch of physics, so the fact that the instances of contents are psychological entities does not entail that logic is a branch of psychology.⁵

The extrusion of thoughts, in the sense of ideal, repeatable contents, from the individual minds in which they just so happen to be instantiated is, on Husserl’s view, really just a special

⁵ This by now is a familiar point. See, for instance, Willard, 1994, Smith, “Logic and Formal Ontology,” 1989, Martin, 1999.

case of extruding what is ideal from what is real, an extrusion that he regards as mandatory in any domain of existence whatsoever. Granted that such a distinction exists, no linguistic turn is necessary. Rather, a philosophy of thought can, as it seems it ought, proceed by consulting (among other things) the actual processes of thinking, meaning, knowing, and so forth, not qua contingent empirical episodes but qua ideal, repeatable types or “essences.” Such an approach, however, surely counts as mythological by Dummett’s lights, and so locating contents, meanings and so forth in “language” might seem mandatory.

This, however, brings us to the second point on which Dummett is mistaken, and that is in supposing that making the linguistic turn, and thus preserving the objectivity of thoughts, is sufficient to avoid the pitfalls of psychologism. There is a powerful argument against Dummett’s position which, strangely enough, is not mentioned by those who have expressly addressed Dummett’s arguments against Husserl, and it is that this position is subject to most, if not all, of the arguments Husserl leveled against psychologism. What Husserl finds *fundamentally* objectionable about psychologism is not it grounds logic in *psychology* or renders it or its subject matter “subjective” or “private,” but that it grounds logic on an *empirical* basis. Logical laws are “as little psychological as they are empirical,” (*LI Prolegomena*, 23, 105) and the whole case for psychologism rests upon an empiricistic obliviousness to the “distinction between ideal and real objects, and the corresponding distinction between ideal and real laws.” (*LI Prolegomena* 24, p. 110. See also sections 48 and 51.) This is why Husserl’s extends his critique of psychologism to the biologism of Mach and Avenarius, (*LI, Prolegomena*, secs. 52-56) and to empiricism as such. So, any position according to which logical entities and the laws pertaining to them are ontologically dependent upon actually existing languages or its speakers, or which entails that our knowledge of them is epistemically grounded in knowledge of empirical

facts about languages, the conventions of linguistic communities, or the antics of their individual members, is in the same boat as psychologism, however “objective” such entities might be. For such a position entails that the laws of logic are merely contingent, and that our knowledge of them is a posteriori, both of which are false.⁶ Just as logical laws do not explicitly or implicitly say anything whatsoever about consciousness or conscious beings, neither do they explicitly or implicitly say anything about actual languages or speakers.⁷ Just as logical laws cannot be verified or refuted on the basis of empirical propositions asserting the real existence of minds, so they cannot be verified or refuted on the basis of empirical propositions asserting the real existence of languages and speakers.⁸ Just as the truth of logical laws is, in virtue of being necessary, independent of the existence and empirical character of our minds, so it is independent of the existence and empirical features of our languages.

One might respond that a theory of meaning or thought is not grounded in empirical facts about languages, but in the essence or “concept” of language as such. Surely a great deal of linguistic philosophy, not excepting Dummett’s own, proceeds as if this is so, brimming, as it does, with blatantly non-empirical (and non-analytic) claims about meaning, truth, reference, and so forth, whose truth-makers and justifiers surely don’t seem to be the waggings of this or that tongue. But if it is legitimate to investigate language in an a priori fashion, then it’s not exactly obvious why it is illegitimate to investigate consciousness itself in such fashion—to ask what the essences of thinking, perceiving, knowing, and so forth are, and to derive ideal, necessary laws

⁶ See Willard, 1984, p. 161: “This I take to be the strongest point in Husserl’s argument against psychologism as he understood it. If the laws of logic were psychological laws, then the evidence which we have for them would have to be based upon a careful analysis of cognitive experiences and justified by its result.” And if the laws of logic were somehow dependent upon empirical facts about language, then our knowledge of them would have to be based upon a careful description of those facts.

⁷ LI Prolegomena, sec. 23. See also sec. 28, p. 125: “The truth that the members of such a [contradictory] pair of propositions are not both true, contains no shadow of an empirical assertion about any consciousness and its acts of judgment.”

⁸ LI Prolegomena, sec. 37, pp. 144-5: “...any theory is logically absurd which deduces logical principles from any matters of fact.”

from such investigations. And this is exactly what the vast bulk of philosophical investigations of perception, knowledge, and so forth have aspired to do, both within and without the Analytic tradition.

What these considerations show is that making the linguistic turn is neither necessary nor sufficient to avoid psychologism, or at least a position similarly flawed. It is not necessary since various properties instantiated in conscious states can be studied non-empirically, that is, by means other than empirical psychology. Nor is it sufficient, since any attempt to ground the laws of logic, or our knowledge thereof, in facts about language, provided that by “language” one means something that has a comfortable place within an empiricist epistemology and a broadly naturalistic metaphysics, is subject to virtually all of the criticisms that Husserl directed at logical psychologism.

Still, nothing thus far said establishes that the linguistic analysis of thought, properly executed, is not the most effective way to develop a comprehensive theory of thought. To endorse the linguistic turn, it is sufficient to recognize “that thought, by its nature, cannot occur without a vehicle, and that language is the vehicle whose operation is the most perspicuous and hence the most amenable to a systematic philosophical account.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 171) Nor does anything said thus far cast any doubt on the Communicability Thesis. So let us turn, first, to Wayne Martin’s argument against Dummett’s position, and then to another that is, I think, more powerful.

II.

The most obvious place to look for linguistically inexpressible content is in acts of perception, and that is exactly where Wayne Martin alleges to have discovered it. Martin argues that “the

noematic content of experience” both (i) contributes to the “objective content” of the experience and (ii) makes a contribution that no “linguistic expression of that content” could.⁹ (Martin, 1999, pp. 358-9) His example involves the noematic structures involved in seeing Mt. Shasta as one approaches it by automobile. The noematic structures of the experience do all of the following: (a) provide a local sense of direction and movement, and by those means gives one a sense of (b) the objective distance of the mountain, which together with one’s own speed, provides (c) information regarding the objective size of the mountain. (Martin, 1999, pp. 357-8) These features of the noematic content make a distinctive contribution to the objective content of the experience because “it is part of the structure in virtue of which my experience *amounts to* experience of an enduring object.” (Martin, 1999, p. 359) And they are inexpressible linguistically. “Certainly no analysis of the meaning of English or German would suffice. We can no more establish our sense of direction on the basis of semantic analysis than we can establish the shortest distance axiom on an analysis of the terms ‘shortest’ and ‘straight’.” (Martin, 1999, p. 359)

Dummett is the first to admit that “...perception is that mental act least obviously fitted to be expressed in words.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 27) And far from pursuing the route of John McDowell or Bill Brewer by asserting that the content of perception is exclusively “conceptual”—a position for which Martin’s example spells obvious trouble—Dummett criticizes both Frege and Husserl for assimilating perceptual consciousness too closely to

⁹ I have refrained from discussing Husserl’s position in terms of noemata and their contents because, while I think I know what noemata aren’t, I have no clear idea what they are or exactly what they are supposed to do in addition to the noetic aspects of an act. Martin’s argument, however, does not rely on any contentious theses about noemata; it is enough, for the purposes of his argument, if experiential acts have noetic contents or structures (such as matters and qualities) that contribute to the objective content of the thought and are linguistically inexpressible – as they must, in any case, if noematic contents have these features as well. Indeed, given the oft-alleged parallelism between noeses and noemata, I feel entirely comfortable side-stepping the entire multi-sided debate over the nature of noemata – thereby, I suppose, showing my true stripes as a noematic eliminativist.

thought.¹⁰ According to Dummett, perceptual experiences, including even the sorts of cognitive skills involved in determining local direction and recognizing typicalities, do not belong on the level of full-fledged thought, but to “proto-thought.” Dummett is ready to admit that, to use his own example, a driver who must rapidly adjust his speed and direction is engaged in “highly concentrated thought,” but also that “the vehicle of such thoughts is certainly not language.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 122) Instead, however, of treating this as evidence against his view, Dummett instead draws the conclusion that such “thoughts” are merely proto-thoughts, which are distinguished from full-fledged thoughts by their “incapacity for detachment from present activities and circumstances.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 123) Such proto-thoughts are likely to be confused with full-fledged thoughts because we “slide so readily” from one to the other, but we must nevertheless distinguish them if we are to make sense of the ability of drivers, children, and non-linguistic animals to navigate their environments successfully.

In light of the distinction between proto-thought and full-fledged thought, Dummett can respond to Martin’s second point as follows: yes, the acts in virtue of which someone driving towards Mt. Shasta acquires a local sense of direction, a sense of the mountain’s distance and size, do not have language as their vehicles. But this doesn’t entail that thoughts (or thought contents) are not all linguistically expressible, since those acts don’t take place at the level of thought. With respect to the first point—that such contents are objective in the sense that they are partially constitutive of the experience being of an enduring object—Dummett can respond that it is no part of his theory that proto-thoughts must lack objective content, that is, directedness upon objective, enduring objects. The distinction between proto-thought and full-fledged thought is not that the latter possesses, while the former lacks, objective content, but that

¹⁰ “Both Frege and Husserl surely went too far in assimilating the ‘interpretation’ whose informing our sensations constitutes our sense-perceptions to the thoughts that we express in language.” (Dummett, 1993, p. 121)

the former is a sort of content that is utterly dependent on present activities and circumstances.¹¹ Nor is Dummett committed to rejecting the view that episodes of thought might depend, for their existence and/or their specific intentional bearing, on occurrences at the level of proto-thought.

This response is not without difficulties, however. The first is that the foregoing considerations concerning the division between thought and something like but less than thought might not only cast doubt on Martin's argument against Dummett, they might cast doubt on Dummett's argument against Husserl as well. Charles Parsons raises the question whether Dummett is right in contending that Husserl's generalization of something like sense beyond its application to linguistically expressible acts precludes him from making the linguistic turn, since such an extension "is most in evidence when it is applied in domains whose relation to a domain of *thought* is not simple or straightforward," such as perception and imagination. (Parsons, 2000, p. 130) To claim that the features of such acts in virtue of which they are perceptual or imaginative are linguistically inexpressible would not rule out the linguistic turn, but might pave the way for it, for such features are what *distinguishes* thought from perception and imagination. (Parsons, 2000, p. 132) That is, that perceptual acts have a sense might be compatible with the linguistic turn, provided that the features in virtue of which it is *perceptual* do not themselves lie at the level of sense. And so we, in turn, might respond to Dummett that Husserl's account of intentionality does not rule out the linguistic turn, at least not for the reason that he supposes, because although perceptual and other intuitive acts do have a sense, their sense is not what distinguishes them from non-intuitive or signitive acts.

To this argument Dummett has, I think, a ready response, and that is that Husserl himself very explicitly holds, in his writings some time after the *Investigations*, that the linguistically inexpressible components of a noema possess something very much like a sense. That is,

¹¹ For an account of nonconceptual content along these lines, see Kelly, 2001.

Husserl seems committed to a view according to which there are contents of mental acts that are both (a) very much like senses but (b) do not have language as their vehicle.¹² But that is not the position Dummett endorses; proto-thoughts, for him, are not full-fledged thoughts without linguistic clothing, nor are they almost like full-fledged thoughts, as they seem to be for Husserl. Rather, proto-thoughts differ from full-fledged thoughts in kind; they are not two species of a common genus. Of course, Dummett surely owes us an explanation why, if this is so, we slide so readily from one to the other. But at least it's not obvious that the envisaged Dummettian response to Martin's argument undermines Dummett's own argument against Husserl.

The second worry is that the envisaged Dummettian response to Martin's argument might seem entirely to beg the question against Martin, for it might appear that Dummett's principal reason for distinguishing thought from proto-thought is on the basis of linguistic expressibility itself. But what is in question is precisely whether or not all thoughts are linguistically expressible, and so appealing to linguistic expressibility as a criterion for thoughthood begs the question at hand. And yet Dummett is drawing, in his own fashion, a distinction that philosophers have drawn since Plato distinguished between *aisthesis* and *noesis*, a distinction between intuition and understanding or conception, and the contention that language is, or at least can be, the vehicle of conceptual thinking is one that is independently plausible. For what distinguishes conceptual content is that it can serve as the content of acts that differ from one another in their specific intuitive content. Husserl writes of the matter of an act, wherein its *sense* lies: "However the fullness of a presentation may vary within its possible gradients of fulfilment, its intentional object, intended as it is intended, remains the same: its 'matter', in

¹² See *Ideas I*, sec. 124, p. 294: "But one can scarcely avoid... extending the signification of these words ['signifying' and 'signification'] and suitably modifying them so that they can find application of a certain kind to the whole noetic-noematic sphere: thus application to all acts, be they now combined with expressive acts or not."

other words, stays the same.”¹³ And that is exactly what characterizes linguistically expressible content as well. It is a constitutive principle of linguistic competence that someone who can understand an utterance of, say, ‘snow is white’ can do so whether or not any snow, or anything white, is intuitively present. Even sentences involving certain demonstratives (with the possible exception of ‘I’) have this character: I can know exactly what an utterance of ‘that table is brown’ means without seeing the table in *just this way*, or even presently seeing it at all, as when I turn my back to it and utter that sentence while pointing over my shoulder. Though perhaps such contents are not entirely detachable from present circumstances and activities, they are at least detachable from the specific intuitive or perceptual contents that often accompany them. This perhaps explains why Husserl endorses what Smith and McIntyre call the “expressibility thesis,” namely that the “noematic Sinn” or matter of any act can be linguistically expressed. (See *Ideas I*, sec. 124, p. 295 and Smith and McIntyre, 1982, pp. 182-4)

Whatever one makes of Dummett’s distinction between thought and proto-thought, it is at least obvious that what distinguishes thought from perception, and perceptual acts among themselves, does not, in all cases, lie at the level of sense. Dummett, unfortunately and surely in opposition to his considered view, himself sometimes implies that there is a distinct sense corresponding to each way in which an object is given: “If someone knows what the referent of an expression is, then this referent must be given to him in some particular way, and the way in which it is given constitutes the sense which he attaches to the expression.” (Dummett, 1993, p. 23) But this is surely false. You don’t need to see the referent of the expression ‘the green

¹³ Husserl puts forward the same position in *Ideas I*: acts in which the “full noema” differs can nevertheless have identical “noematic cores.” See, for instance, secs. 91 and 136. The idea that conceptual contents are detachable from present circumstances and/or experiences is also something to which McDowell seems committed: “We can ensure that what we have in view is genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity if we insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself.” (McDowell, 1994, p. 57)

house' from just this point of view, in just this way, to know what its referent is. If you did, then the sense would not be what we each grasp when we understand the sentence "the green house is large," since, when we each understand that sentence simultaneously, it will never be the case that the house is given in the same way.¹⁴ This is why Husserl insists that although an object or person may—or rather must—appear differently in different perceptual circumstances, "Each appearance from such an intuitive manifold will justify a precisely synonymous use of the proper name." (*LI VI*, 7, 693) The same point holds for demonstratives. The relative autonomy from intuition is precisely what characterizes the sphere of sense, the "conceptual sphere," as Dummett himself seems to acknowledge in his distinction between thought and proto-thought.

If senses, thus construed, are the sole components of thoughts with which a philosophy of thought must concern itself, then a philosophy of thought need not concern itself with those features of mental acts in virtue of which they are perceptual or, more broadly, intuitive. And so Dummett might respond to Martin that the features of acts that are admittedly inexpressible, or at least inexpressible in the same way senses are, do not really belong to the level of thought because they do not belong at the level of sense. Whatever way in which one can represent Mt. Shasta *as being* can be expressed in the form of a statement, even if the particular ways in which it is represented as being that way cannot.

If this response is right, then perhaps the Husserlian theory of intentionality presented in the *Logical Investigations*, prior to his generalizing the notion of sense beyond what can be expressed, is compatible with the linguistic turn. But it's not. One reason is that, although Husserl there agrees with Dummett in locating sense at the level of (expressible) thought, he

¹⁴ "We must, in describing the fine-grained phenomenology, make use of the notion of the *way* in which some property or relation is given in the experience. The same shape can be perceived in two different ways, and the same holds for the shape properties, if we regard them as within the representational content of the experience." (Peacocke, 2001, p. 240) Not only can the same shape be perceived in two different ways, but it can be represented *as being the same shape* in both acts. See also Kelly, 2001.

does not agree that a comprehensive philosophy of thought must or can confine itself to the level of sense. And neither, for that matter, would Martin. For even Martin is prepared to admit that the noematic features of experiential states that defy linguistic expression do not reside at the level of sense.¹⁵ And yet they are essential for the act to bear upon just the object that it does. This is something that Husserl himself insists upon when he characterizes perception as an act which, though it does not carry or confer meaning, is a necessary condition for certain meanings, namely demonstratives, to have a determinate reference. (See *LI VI*, secs. 4-5) As most would agree, you don't know what thought I am expressing when I say 'that bird is black' unless you know which bird I am referring to, and this involves either present or recent perceptual acquaintance with the bird. "Thus," writes Barry Smith, "[Husserl] allows that the linguistic act that is here incomplete as far as meaning is concerned may come to be saturated or made complete by acts of other sorts, in this case by acts of perception." (Smith, 1989b, p. 170) And so, provided a comprehensive theory of thought must concern itself with those mental acts upon which acts of thought *constitutively* depend, a theory of thought must concern itself with acts that, by Dummett's lights, lie within the sphere of proto-thought. The dispute between Dummett and Martin, therefore, centers around the issues of (a) whether full-fledged thought constitutively depends on proto-thought, and, perhaps more importantly, (b) whether, if it does, a comprehensive account of full-fledged thought must concern itself with proto-thought as well.

III.

Now that may well constitute part of the debate between Dummett and Husserl as well. But it is definitely not the decisive one. Husserl, as early as his account in the *Logical Investigations* and

¹⁵ "The fact that there is extra-conceptual structure in my experience, and that this structure makes a distinctive contribution to the determination of objective reference, shows that senses do not do *all* the work in determining the intentional content of my experience." (Martin, 1999, p. 359)

thus prior to his generalization of the idea of sense to the inexpressible components of acts, holds a position incompatible with the Communicability Thesis. And Martin's position is not obviously incompatible with that thesis, since CT maintains only that all contents of *thoughts* are communicable. What makes Husserl's position incompatible with CT is that he holds that there are contents of full-fledged thoughts, and full-fledged thoughts that amount to *knowledge*, that cannot be linguistically expressed.

Husserl does, to be sure, draw a very intimate connection between thought and language. "All thought," he writes, "and in particular all theoretical thought and knowledge, is carried on by way of certain 'acts', which occur in a context of expressive discourse." (*LI VI*, Introduction, p. 667) And yet there are certain cases of thinking and knowing which are such that not *all* of their contents are capable of linguistic expression. Otherwise put, the expressible contents of an act are those moments making up its intentional essence, but the intentional essence does not comprise the full intentional content of the act. To see this, note that mental acts with the same expressible content—the same matter and quality—can vary in phenomenologically obvious and epistemically relevant ways. I can think that my table is brown, and can produce and understand precisely synonymous utterances and inscriptions of sentences that express that thought, whether or not my table is perceptually present to me or not. In the latter case, my thought is "empty" or "signitive." In the former case it is intuitively fulfilled: the table is not only meant, but is present to me as I mean it to be, and I am conscious of its being as I mean it. Acts of this sort are cases of *fulfillment*. In the ideal case of fulfillment—it permits of more and less, insofar as something might be presented more or less as one means it—I "experience how *the same* objective item

which was ‘merely thought of’ in symbol is now presented in intuition, and that it is intuited as being precisely the determinate so-and-so that it was at first merely thought or meant to be.”¹⁶

Despite assurances to the contrary by certain philosophers, finding the world to be as one thinks it to be is among the most commonplace of experiences. And yet it is not a simple one. Rather, it involves at least two mental acts. The first is the “mere thought” that something is the case. The second is an intuition of the *very thing* that was merely thought of. For this reason, Husserl characterizes fulfillment as an act of identification, in which the two constituent acts achieve a “unity of identity.”¹⁷ (*LI VI*, sec. 8, p. 696) This structure is most evident in the dynamic case of fulfillment, in which something that is merely thought of at one time is later intuitively presented as it was thought to be, but Husserl insists that even in the static case the same structure is in place. It is, however, “a seamless unity, which only acquires articulation when drawn out in time.” (*LI VI*, sec. 9, p. 698)

Although Husserl does not always successfully distinguish between perception and fulfillment, acts of fulfillment are substantially more complex than mere acts of perceiving, because they involve not only apprehending an object or state of affairs perceptually, but *thoughtfully* as well. In order to have one’s thought that *p* fulfilled on an intuitive basis, one must actually think that *p*. There are many cases in which perception can occur without fulfillment. For instance, I might thumb through a deck of cards in pursuit of the queen of

¹⁶ *LI 6*, 8, 694. See also *LI VI*, 16, 720: “What the intention means, but presents only in more or less inauthentic and inadequate manner, the fulfillment – the act attaching itself to an intention, and offering it ‘fullness’ in the synthesis of fulfillment – *sets directly before us*, or at least more directly than the intention does. In fulfillment our experience is represented by the words: ‘*This is the thing itself*.’”

¹⁷ Husserl seems, in some of his later works, to abandon the view that fulfillment involves two acts. Certainly he abandons the view that *perception* does. What’s just not clear at any point in Husserl’s writings is whether and to what degree he distinguishes fulfillment and perception. For more on this, see Hopp (forthcoming). In any case, such a distinction must be made, for the reasons given in the text: neither perception, nor even perception plus thought, invariably amount to fulfillment. Not only can one think about things about things without intuiting them—a possibility that Husserl frankly acknowledges—but one can also intuit things without thinking about them. And one can do *both* without the relevant synthesis taking place.

spades and perceive fifty-two cards, yet not have the thought that there are fifty-two cards fulfilled because I had no such thought. My seeing of the cards is, as Dretske would say, “non-epistemic.” And I may, in checking whether a deck is complete and fulfilling my thought that there are fifty-two cards, perceive the queen of spades, without having any thoughts about it fulfilled. Moreover, creatures with conceptual deficiencies cannot experience certain sorts of fulfillment, not for lack of the appropriate sensory organs, but for want of the ability to carry out the relevant thoughts. A monkey can perceive a computer, but cannot, given some plausible assumptions about the conceptual sophistication of monkeys, have the thought that something is a computer fulfilled. Finally, the acts must enter into the appropriate relationship with one another, a “synthesis of identity.” It is possible both to perceive an object and to have a thought about it without, however, having one’s thought fulfilled by the perception. One might, for instance, wonder where one’s keys or glasses are despite the fact that one is looking right at them.

Acts of fulfillment possess a further property, and that is that they lead one closer to the goal of, and in many cases constitute, knowledge, and do so in virtue of their intuitive content, which presents the intended object itself. Holding all of my other beliefs constant, I am in a better situation epistemically if my belief that my table is brown is fulfilled on an intuitive basis than I am if I merely believe that it is empty. Indeed, while not all acts of knowing are fulfillments—if they were, most scientific knowledge would be impossible—fulfillment is exactly what knowledge at its best is. Of all the individual reasons one can have for believing that something is thus and so, finding it to be as one thinks it to be—thus and so—is typically the best.

In light of this, we can now ask: is it, after all, the essence of thought to be communicable without residue by means of language? Obviously this hangs on just what it means for a content to be *expressible* or *communicable*. Now in one sense, as Dummett insists, everything, including thoughts, knowledge, and “every other type of awareness,” is communicable in language. “It is senseless to assert that there is something of which we cannot speak: for if we cannot speak of it, our attempt to speak of it must necessarily be frustrated.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 141) The present discussion ensures that any attempt, on my part, to claim that intuitive contents cannot be objects of discourse will be self-defeating.

This, however, is not the only, or even the most fruitful, concept of communicability or expressibility available, as Dummett himself well knows. All “ideas” or subjective occurrences are communicable, for Dummett, but not in the same way that thoughts are. (Dummett, 1994, p. 141) And it’s easy to see that the sense in which an object of discourse, whether an idea or a public object, is communicated or expressed is radically different than the sense in which a thought-content or sense is expressed. The expressed propositional content of a sentence is typically not to found among the objects that that sentence is about. In the sentence “Grass is green,” the concepts of grass and of green are expressed, but they are not objects of discourse. That sentence is not used to predicate greenness of a sense or concept, nor to predicate a sense or concept (in the more widespread, non-Fregean sense of the term ‘concept’) to grass. (The difference between the concept and the property of green is readily apparent when we realize that what it is to possess one is not what it is to possess the other.) And although everything of which we can speak can be expressed in the sense of being spoken of, not everything can be expressed in the sense in which the concept of green is expressed in the sentence above. Such things as trees and colors and my left knee might be constituents of states of affairs or truth-makers, and so

objects of discourse, but they are not the right kinds of things to serve as constituents of truth-bearers or thoughts. And they are never linguistically expressed in the same way that concepts or senses are. They do not mean anything, are not about anything, in the way that senses and propositions do and are.

Just what is it for something to be communicable or expressible by means of language in this sense? It's difficult to say exactly, but perhaps it is best to see what, minimally, must happen when someone succeeds in communicating something to someone else by means of language. Language can be used to do a number of things. But without doubt one of the fundamental purposes of linguistic communication is to cause someone to think thoughts. Very often one voluntarily acquaints oneself with linguistic signs for the sole purpose of being caused to think certain thoughts; I have in mind such activities as opening up a book or attending a talk. When one speaker or writer succeeds in communicating something, in this sense, to someone else, what must happen is that the latter winds up being in a mental state with the same, or partially the same, content as that of the former. In Fregean terms, when I understand a sentence, I “grasp” the thought that it expresses. And we know what such “grasping” amounts to on Husserl's view: being in a mental state whose matter instantiates the sense or meaning expressed in the sentence. If you tell me that your house is white, I thereby, provided I am paying attention to you, come to be in a mental state whose matter-content is that your house is white. Roughly, then, a content *C* is communicable by means of a sentence *S* of *L* iff a competent speaker of *L* would be in a mental state with *C* as its content upon understanding an utterance or inscription of *S*.¹⁸

¹⁸ “If we succeed in communicating with our hearer, we will convey to him a meaning whereby he will come to intend this same object. Indeed, he will intend it through the same noematic Sinn we do...” (Smith and McIntyre, 1982, p. 180)

Intuitive contents are not linguistically communicable in this sense. If I understand an utterance of yours, I do not thereby come to be in a mental state with the same *intuitive* content as yours; there are no particular intuitive contents that are necessary for me to understand an utterance of yours, except those intuitive contents which acquaint me with your tokening of a sentence itself. Because no particular intuitive contents are necessary for me to be in a mental state with the same matter-contents as yours, no matter-contents are sufficient for me to be in a mental state with the same intuitive contents as yours. There is, at least in the case of non-performative utterances, nothing that you can communicate to me in words that is sufficient for me to be in a mental state with the same intuitive content as your own. And insofar as intuitive contents are necessary components of acts of fulfillment, there is nothing that you can communicate to me in words that is sufficient for me to have the communicated thought fulfilled on an intuitive basis. If you tell me your house is white, or that you perceive that your house is white, or even describe to me in vivid detail how the house appears to you from your present vantage point, I am no closer to being in a mental state whose intuitive contents fulfill the thought that your house is white; I am no closer to finding the house to be as I think it to be. In short, no amount of talking on your part—except the sort of talking that induces me to situate myself in eyeshot of your house, such as threats or bribes—can put me in a mental state in which the house is given to me as I think it to be.

The thesis, then, that all contents of thoughts can be communicated without residue by linguistic means is false. Telling someone that a is F is not sufficient to provide someone with a fulfilling intuition that a is F. And insofar as having or lacking such a fulfilling intuition *sometimes* spells the difference between knowing and not knowing, and virtually *always* accounts for some difference in the epistemic status of the respective thoughts, that, I think, is a

fairly significant “residue” left untouched by language. And since the truth of the Communicability Thesis is a necessary condition for the legitimacy of the sort of linguistic analysis of thought envisioned by Dummett and countless others, making such a linguistic turn cannot provide a comprehensive theory of thought and knowledge.

It might be objected that the intuitive contents in question belong to the level of proto-thought. Perhaps so, when those contents are constituents of mere perception, and perform no fulfilling function. But in the unity of fulfillment, such perceptual acts become one with an act of meaning, an act at the level of thought itself. Such acts, that is, aren't merely acts upon which acts of thought constitutively depend, but acts which, when united in the right way with acts of thought, are themselves *constituents* of acts of thought and knowledge. And one can see that an act of fulfillment is a genuine whole, rather than a mere sum, when one realizes that it often has properties that its constituent acts and heaps composed of them lack, such as a positive epistemic status. An act of mere perception is never an act of knowing, and a merely empty thought might have any epistemic status whatsoever. But an act of perceptual fulfillment of any appreciable degree has a positive epistemic status. In fulfillment, an object is not just given to the brain, or to an “informational system,” or even to consciousness, but to *thought*. And talking to someone just is not sufficient to make him possess knowledge, or at least knowledge of the same kind and degree as that which occurs in fulfillment. So it is also false that “any knowledge we have must be communicable.” (Dummett, 1994, p. 140) While the conceptual or propositional content of knowledge is communicable, in the sense that by talking to someone I can, if he understands me, place him in a mental state with the same propositional content as my own, knowledge itself need not be. A person does not, in all cases, come to know that *p* just because I successfully communicate that *p* to him, even if my act of thinking that *p* is or has been fulfilled. And even if

he does, as may happen, his knowledge does not rest upon an acquaintance with the state of affairs designated by the proposition that *p*, but, in part, on his confidence in my veracity. Your knowledge, if you can be said to have it, that my office is a mess does not have the same epistemic status as mine, since you are obliged to take my word for it, while I get to consult my office itself. And that undoubtedly places me in a stronger epistemic position with respect to this content than you.

So if part of the task of a philosophy of thought consists in spelling out the nature of knowledge, or distinguishing good from bad thinking, it must, if Husserl is right, incorporate an account of fulfillment, and so must incorporate into its account those linguistically inexpressible contents that do the fulfilling. And it seems obvious to me that a comprehensive theory of thought must have something to say about knowledge. And this is Husserl's view as well. Indeed, Husserl's view is that fulfillment is the goal towards which all unfulfilled, signitive thinking is teleologically oriented, and that, as such, one simply cannot grasp what intentionality in general, or any positing intentional act in particular, is without grasping what happens or would happen when it succeeds in reaching its goal. That goal is truth, of course, but more importantly, the *consciousness of truth*—the consciousness of the correspondence between our thoughts about things and the things those thoughts are about—that occurs in acts of fulfillment. Meanings are authentically grasped, not by grasping their truth conditions alone, but by grasping how, if at all, those truth conditions (or their contradictories) would present themselves to consciousness. Thus Husserl writes, “The concept of any intentionality whatsoever... and the concept of evidence, that intentionality that is the giving of something-itself, are essentially correlative.” (Husserl, *FTL*, sec. 60, p. 160) And yet, while knowledge of the fulfilling conditions of a thought is presupposed by thought itself, actual fulfillment is not, like a thought's

sense, something for which language is a vehicle. Rather, fulfillment is achieved by means of the intuitive content of the meaning-fulfilling act, something that, *even on Dummett's own terms*, is not linguistically expressed or communicable in the same way senses or thoughts are.

To wrap up, then, I have argued that (a) making the linguistic turn is neither necessary nor sufficient for avoiding psychologism, or a position with most of the same flaws as psychologism, and (b) there are certain contents, namely intuitive contents, which both cannot be linguistically expressed and belong, at least in those instances when they fulfill meaning-intentions, to *thoughts* rather than or in addition to “proto-thoughts.” These considerations, I think, go at least some way towards vindicating the direct inspection of conscious subjectivity as an indispensable method whereby to understand the nature of thought and how it bears upon the world.

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