

## **Response to Josep Lluís Prades**

1. In some central parts of his later work, Wittgenstein considers a line of thought that threatens to deprive us of the idea of following a rule.

In §206 he says “Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order”. In §431 and its sequel, he in effect elaborates that remark, bringing out how, in reflection about orders and obedience to them, we risk philosophical confusions corresponding to those that threaten us when we reflect about rule-following. And his discussion of the relation between orders and obedience is intertwined with discussing the relation between, say, expectation and things turning out as expected, or between thought and things being as they are thought to be. (See, e.g., §437.)

This seems to indicate that he thinks his treatment for the threatened paradox about rule-following is, at least at some level, potentially illuminating also in connection with a difficulty we risk falling into in reflection about intentional states.

2. Prades is clearly right that the details of Wittgenstein’s treatment of the rule-following paradox cannot be carried over into a treatment for the difficulty, whatever it is, about intentional states. In §201 Wittgenstein encapsulates his treatment of the rule-following paradox by saying that “there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases”. In §202 he draws a conclusion from that: “And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice.” It would surely not be sensible to try to imitate that further conclusion in dealing with the case of, say, intention and its execution. As Prades in effect insists, there is no sense in which it would be so much as correct — let alone potentially helpful in protecting us against misconceptions of intentions and their execution — to say that executing an intention is a practice.<sup>1</sup> If there is a match between the things it is useful to say about the two cases, it must be at a different level.

Where should we look for a match, then? Prades invokes a hostility on Wittgenstein’s part to the idea that supposedly detached mental particulars, items conceived as in themselves without content, could somehow take on the intentional character of thoughts or expectations by being placed in some suitable context. The role of the supposedly intentionality-inducing context

would be analogous to the supposedly always necessary role for interpretation, in turning something that is a mere dead object (say a sign-post, conceived as in itself nothing but a material object with certain physical properties) into an expression of a rule (in the same example, something that points the way to go). That is just what, in §201, Wittgenstein identifies as the root of the trouble we get into about rule-following.

But I do not believe this fully captures Wittgenstein's target in such passages as §437. Prades notes that Wittgenstein connects the internal relations that are constitutive of intentional states with the hardness of the logical "must". (The connection is explicit in §437.) But I do not believe Prades gives this connection its full significance.

The conception Wittgenstein deals with in §437 and its sequel is not, anyway not exclusively, a conception of intentional states as mental configurations that are intrinsically content-free. A line of thought that is at least part of his target could be expressed by saying that intentional states, so far from being items that are in themselves content-free but acquire content as an add-on by an analogue to interpretation, are *nothing but content* — with content conceived as what, in minds, is capable of meshing with the crystalline super-hard material (as it were; this language carries its pictorial character on its face) that supposedly constitutes the essence of the thinkable (see §97). Intentional states are configurations in the mental material (as it were) composing the wheels that engage with the super-rigid rails marked out in conceptual space by meanings (see §218).

3. We can appreciate the pull of such imagery in connection, first, with the regress of interpretations that Wittgenstein identifies as the basis of the paradox about rule-following.

If there is to be application for the concept of acting in accord with a rule, it can seem that the mere dead object that we want to see as an expression of the rule — say a sign-post — needs to be *interpreted* as prescribing some actions and forbidding others. But to give an interpretation would be to make another attempt at an expression of the rule (see the last paragraph of §201). As such, the new attempt would be just as much in need of interpretation as the first candidate for being an expression of the rule — the sign-post, to stay with the same example. It is only for a moment that some attempt to give an interpretation can seem to bridge the gulf between the dead object and its being correct, for instance, to go to the left if one is aiming to reach the destination to which the sign-post points the way. Offering to interpret the interpretation only postpones the issue. The gulf remains; the object stays dead.

That could be put by saying that the regress of interpretations threatens the hardness of the logical "must", as it applies in connection with rule-following: the hardness of the "must" that figures in saying something of the form "To conform to the rule expressed here, you must do such-and-such".

And now it can be tempting to think we can avert this threat even if we let the regress start. We purport to bring the regress to a stop by appealing to something that is an interpretation, but unlike an ordinary interpretation, in not being vulnerable to being interpreted otherwise than so as to yield the right sorting of action into what accords with the rule and what does not. Arriving at an interpretation of this supposedly hardness-preserving kind would be getting one's mental wheels locked on to the right rails, engaged with the right structure in the crystalline order.

In §431, Wittgenstein considers a counterpart to this pseudo-solution of the problem about rule-following posed by the regress of interpretations. The counterpart is this: "There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding."

Here, as in the case of the supposed gulf between an expression of a rule and an action in which one follows the rule, the right move is to deny that there is always a gulf. Of course orders, like attempts at expressing rules, can be unclear, needing to be interpreted. But, to echo §201, there is a way of obeying an order that is not an interpretation.

If we do not question the claim that there is always that gulf, we are subject to a version of the regress of interpretations. And now it can seem that an act of understanding might be able to bridge the supposed gulf — to preserve the hardness of the "must" that figures in saying something of the form "To obey this order, you must do such-and-such". But this can seem to work only if we conceive the act of understanding on the model of the supposedly regress-terminating interpretation that figures in that pseudo-solution of the rule-following problem: that is, in a way that is captured by the image of something that engages with the crystalline essence of the thinkable.

This opens naturally into §437. By this point in the text, we have seen two cases, rule-following and obedience to orders, in which there is a lively temptation to suppose the hardness of the logical "must" can be protected only by resorting to the mythology of a crystalline structure. I think the primary target, in the discussion of intentional states that begins at §437, is a generalization of that. The idea under attack is that we can preserve the hardness of the "must" that figures in saying, for instance, "If this expectation is to be fulfilled, such-and-such is what must happen" only by conceiving expectations in terms of that mythology of engagement with a super-rigid order.

4. Kripke uses the idea of normativity to bring under a single head the relation of the meaning of a rule to action in accord with it and the relation of intention to execution. I endorse that, and Prades objects. He thinks the assimilation sets up a tension in my views.

The only interpretation Prades considers, for the thesis that the relation between meaning and action is normative, is one we could explicate by elaborating Wittgenstein's remark that obeying a rule is a practice. The norms that

are brought into view by this interpretation of the thesis are the norms of a communal practice. So Prades thinks the assimilation puts at risk my entitlement to deny, as I did above (§1), that we might exploit a conception of executing an intention as a practice, in undermining the difficulty Wittgenstein considers about the idea of intentions and their execution.

But as I understand Kripke's remark, the sense in which, for these purposes, it is correct to say the relation of the meaning of a rule to action is normative pertains to what is needed for *generating* the apparent problem about rule-following, not to what Wittgenstein says in dissolving it, which can be, as Prades urges, special to that case.

What generates the apparent problem about rule-following is that the idea of a rule needs a conceptual context in which we can use the idea of *accord*. (See §§198 and 201.) And the notion of accord is already a normative notion, in the sense that matters for Kripke's assimilation. We need to be able to distinguish action that is correct in the light of the rule from action that is not. It can be tempting to think we can make this distinction only by attaching an interpretation to a dead object. If we succumb to that temptation, we have embarked on the regress, which threatens to undermine the applicability of the notion of accord.

The Kripkean assimilation I mean to endorse is this: the notion of accord — which is itself, as I said, a normative notion in the relevant sense — is needed, in a parallel way, for the viability of the idea of intention. (And similarly with intentional states in general.) Just as my understanding of the instruction "Add 2" is such that when I have reached 1000, only my writing "1002" will accord with it, so my intention to climb a certain tree is such that only my climbing that tree will accord with it. As Prades says, a primitive intention is not an intention to submit one's behaviour to a pre-existing norm. But this does not tell against the assimilation, rightly understood. It is the intention itself that is, in the relevant sense, a norm for the behaviour of its possessor.

Kripke argues that meaning cannot be reductively explained in terms of dispositions. He means to be speaking of dispositions in a sense that does not allow for a parallel application of the notion of accord. In the relevant sense, a disposition is something that, in certain circumstances, results in a certain outcome. There is no sense in which the outcome is *correct* in the light of the disposition.

Prades is right that we can understand the word "disposition" in a different sense, one that makes it appropriate to identify a certain disposition to act in some way with an intention to act in that way. With dispositions so understood, the notion of accord fits, and with it the hardness of the logical "must". But in the sense that matters for Kripke's rejection of a reduction, the relation of a disposition to its actualizations involves no logical "must", but only a cause-effect connection. And there is nothing problematic about generalizing Kripke's claim to intentional states. We can reject a reduction of in-

tention to dispositions in the relevant sense, on the ground that the relation of intention to action is normative, in the sense I have tried to explain.

5. I do not think any of this conflicts with Prades's fine treatment of expressive behaviour as the proto-phenomenon of intentionality. But the priority he attaches to that topic is questionable, if we see things in the way I have been urging.

On the reading I have indicated, to get straight about intentionality we would need to free ourselves from the temptation to resort to the mythology of the crystalline order wherever we find the hardness of the logical "must".

It is not clear how insisting that expressive behaviour is the proto-phenomenon of intentionality could help with freeing ourselves from that temptation. As far as that goes, we might accept a central role for expressive behaviour even if we were still bewitched by the mythology. We might suppose that expressive behaviour reveals cases of engagement with the crystalline order. Insisting on expressive behaviour as proto-phenomenon might help to undermine a conception of intentional states as in themselves content-free. But on the reading I have sketched, that is not the primary target of Wittgenstein's reflections about intentional states.

To dislodge the mythology, nothing would serve but uncovering and discrediting the fundamental source of its attractiveness to us. And the best candidate for that is the illusion that it affords a way to protect the hardness of the logical "must" in the rule-following case. So dissolving the rule-following paradox has a priority that we do not put in doubt when we agree with Prades, as we must, that acting intentionally is not as such subjecting oneself to communal norms.

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NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Executing an intention is at least doing something. But if someone is inclined to think that is enough ground for it to be correct to say executing an intention is a practice, she should consider another case. Is expecting things, and having the expectations either satisfied or disappointed, a practice? Surely not.