

## **In Defence of Psychologism (2012)**

Tim Crane

We know of the efforts of such philosophers as Frege and Husserl to undo the “psychologizing” of logic (like Kant’s undoing Hume’s psychologizing of knowledge): now, the shortest way I might describe such a book as the *Philosophical Investigations* is to say that it attempts to undo the psychologizing of psychology. (Cavell 2002: 91)

### **1. Introduction**

The term ‘psychologism’ is normally used for the doctrine that logical and mathematical truths must be explained in terms of psychological truths (see Kusch 1995 and 2011). As such, the term is typically pejorative: the widespread consensus is that psychologism in this sense is a paradigm of philosophical error, a gross mistake that was identified and conclusively refuted by Frege and Husserl.

The consensus is surely correct: there is no future in defending psychologism about logic and mathematics. But as the above remark by Stanley Cavell indicates, ‘psychologism’ and ‘psychologizing’ have been used in a broader way too, to describe attitudes to knowledge, meaning and mind more generally. Michael Dummett, for example, treats Frege’s critique of psychologism as applying to doctrines about meaning as well as doctrines about logic and mathematics:

When Frege engages in polemic against psychologism, what he is concerned to repudiate is the invasion of the theory of meaning by notions concerned with mental processes, mental images, and the like, and the confusion between the process by which we come to acquire a grasp of sense and what constitutes such a grasp. (Dummett 1981: 240)

The term 'theory of meaning' here should be taken to include more than logic, since logic is silent on what constitutes the meanings of any terms other than the logical constants. Dummett is claiming, then, that Frege's attack on psychologism can be extended to views outside logic. Psychologism in Dummett's discussion is a view about understanding the meanings of words ('grasp of sense'). Psychologism holds that what 'constitutes' our grasp of sense is connected in some way with the 'processes by which we come to acquire' such a grasp. Dummett thinks this is a confusion, and that it is one of the targets of Frege's arguments.

What exactly this view about sense is, and whether it is really a confusion, is something I will return to below. At the moment I only want to illustrate the way in which 'psychologism' has been used as a name for doctrines other than the disreputable idea that logic and mathematics should be explained psychologically. Another example of this kind of use can be found in the work of John McDowell, who once described psychologism as the view according to which 'the significance of others' utterances is a subject for guesswork or speculation as to how things are in a private sphere concealed behind their behaviour' (McDowell 1981: 225). Where

Dummett sees psychologism as involving a confusion between constitutive questions about understanding and questions about mechanisms, McDowell sees it as a positive (and surely incredible) proposal about how understanding works. These views are not, of course, incompatible.

So in addition to psychologism about logic and mathematics, there are views about meaning and understanding that have also been called 'psychologism'. My interest here, however, is in the mental or the psychological. According to Cavell, then, Wittgenstein's target in the *Philosophical Investigations* is 'psychologism about psychology' – or about the psychological, since we are not interested here in a discipline but in its subject-matter. What might this be? What does it mean to undo the psychologizing of the psychological? For that matter, what does it mean to 'psychologize' the psychological in the first place? How could one take any other approach to the psychological?

The answer is complicated by the fact that 'psychologism' has been used for a number of different views about the psychological. Ned Block uses the term for 'the doctrine that whether behavior is intelligent behavior depends on the character of the internal information processing that produces it' (Block 1981: 5). And Adrian Cussins has defined psychologism as 'the doctrine that psychology provides at least part of the explanatory basis for the constitutive understanding of the mental' (Cussins 1987: 126-7). The term is a sensible one for both of these views, and both of them (unlike the view described by McDowell, say) are very plausible. So if Wittgenstein's aim was to attack these views, then he had his work cut out. But what was his aim?

On Cavell's view, Wittgenstein's point is that the connections between psychological phenomena and (say) their behavioural manifestations are in a certain way not contingent. The assumption seems to be that a psychologistic approach will only identify causal or contingent connections between phenomena, and that misses something central about the psychological. Wittgenstein wanted to articulate a conception of these connections in terms of notions like 'criteria' and 'grammar', which play the role of something like necessary or analytic connections in other philosophers; or as Cavell puts it, he wanted to 'show the necessity controlling our application of psychological and behavioural categories' (2002: 91).

To the extent that an investigation to these necessary connections is a conceptual investigation, then we can describe *anti*-psychologism about the psychological as the view that the psychological should be investigated in purely conceptual terms. But where does this leave the science of psychology itself? At the end of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein famously said that scientific psychology involves 'experimental methods and conceptual confusion' (1953: 232). This was written over sixty years ago, but it is unlikely that he would have had a different view if he were alive today.

However, not all followers of Wittgenstein take this invidious attitude to psychology. Some of them think that the conceptual investigation of the mind is one thing, and psychology another. These philosophers might rely, for example, on a distinction between the normativity that orders the mind and the underlying causal structure in the brain; or on a distinction between the personal and sub-personal levels of explanation. But whichever they choose, they distinguish between the conceptual

investigation undertaken by philosophy, and the empirical, causal or nomological investigation undertaken by psychology.

Treating anti-psychologism as the idea that the study of the mind is a purely conceptual investigation fits well with Block's and Cussins's definitions of psychologism. Although I agree with the substantive views defended by Block and Cussins, my focus in this essay will be on something more specific in the debate between psychologism and anti-psychologism: their contrasting approaches to intentionality or mental representation. The specific version of anti-psychologism about intentionality I will consider here is the view that intentionality should be understood primarily in *semantic* terms: that is, in terms which relate only to the conditions for the truth and falsehood of representations. I claim that this is a purely conceptual investigation in the sense that it treats the subject-matter of a theory of intentionality as consisting in the attributions articulated in our folk psychological discourse.

Psychologism about intentionality, then, is the denial of this view: intentionality should *not* be understood primarily in semantic terms. This version of psychologism can be directly linked to Frege's discussion of psychologism about logic, via the views of his followers, Dummett and others; as we shall see. I will start with Frege.

## **2. Meaning, communication and intentional content**

Frege's anti-psychologism about logic was based on the maxim that we should 'always separate sharply the logical from the psychological, the objective from the subjective' (Frege 1884). His target was Mill:

So far as it is a science at all, [Logic] is a part, or branch, of Psychology; differing from it, on the one hand as the part differs from the whole, and on the other, as an Art differs from a Science. Its theoretical grounds are wholly borrowed from Psychology, and include as much of that science as is required to justify its rules of art. (Mill 1865: 359)

Frege's objection to psychologism was based on two features of logic: its objectivity and its normativity. The objectivity of logic consists in the fact that logical truths are true independently of whether anyone judges them to be so, or whether anyone thinks about ('grasps') them. So they cannot be truths about psychological facts, since psychological facts cannot obtain regardless of whether they are instantiated in any particular psychological structure.

The normativity of logic consists in the fact that the laws of logic are not like the laws of physics: they are not generalizations about what actually happens, but prescriptions about what ought to happen. As Michael Potter puts it:

In Frege's hands anti-psychologism was a thesis about logic with normative content: logic is the study not of the laws by which we in fact think but of those by which we ought to think; and the normativity of the 'ought' here was

not, Frege thought, simply to be resolved into an account of the benefits that accrue if we reason according to these rules rather than others. (Potter 2008: 18)

A system of laws or generalizations could be objective without being normative (the laws of physics are an example) and could be normative without being objective (moral laws are like this, on some conceptions). But for Frege, logical laws were both normative and objective.

If this is the essence of Frege's anti-psychologism, it is easy to see how it might be extended to apply to the phenomena of meaning and understanding, as Dummett suggests. For it is plausible that that facts about meanings of words have a certain objectivity in relation to any particular linguistic acts of thinkers. Of course, this does not mean that facts about meaning are entirely independent of what speakers do; how could they be? But we can deny this consistently with holding that they are independent of any *particular* linguistic act or intention.

Similarly, meaning does seem to have a normative dimension in the sense that the rules governing the public meanings of words are something to which competent speakers see themselves as answerable. Individual speakers can use words correctly or incorrectly; that is, either in accordance with the norms governing the usage in their language, or in accordance with their own idiolect.

Neither of these claims is exactly parallel to what Frege says about logic and mathematics. A 'platonistic' view of view of meaning – according to which the facts about meaning are somehow timelessly *there* independently of the acts of language-

users – is deeply problematic, as Crispin Wright and others have argued (Wright 2001). And the normativity of meaning is notoriously hard to articulate, since it clearly is not quite the same thing as whatever normativity attaches to logic.

Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that there is *something* to the idea of the objectivity or publicity of meaning. Similarly, we should not deny that there is *something* to the idea that one can go right or wrong in one's use of words, and that meaning is to this extent normative. Frege's own distinction between sense and reference made room for both of these features. The objectivity of reference is an aspect of Frege's realism; and the objectivity of sense he thought was required for the possibility of communication. Communication, he claimed, involves thinkers associating the same or similar thoughts (propositions, the sense of a sentence) with the words expressed. In a letter to Peano, Frege wrote:

The task of our vernacular languages is essentially fulfilled if people engaged in communication with one another connect the same thought, or approximately the same thought, with the same proposition. (Frege 1980:115)

Communication obviously involves understanding, which Frege described in terms of the metaphor of 'grasping' thoughts.

What grasping actually involves is a question Frege himself – by his own admission – did not answer. Grasping must presumably involve some psychological processes; but according to Dummett at least, an account of these processes is not part of a 'constitutive' account of grasp of sense. What matters for the 'constitutive'



account is rather that communication must involve a relation to thoughts. As articulated in his classic paper, 'The Thought' (Frege 1918-19), thoughts are inhabitants of the 'third realm', they exist independently of what anyone thinks, independently of whether anyone grasps them. Thoughts are objective, and to treat them otherwise would be to lapse into psychologism about meaning.

In his much earlier paper, 'On Sense and Reference' (1892), Frege encapsulated this idea in a famous analogy between the sense and reference of a word and the act of looking at the moon through a telescope. The reference of a word is analogous to the moon itself – it is out there, no matter what. The sense is analogous to the image in the telescope – it is partial, from a (literal) point of view, but can be seen by different perceivers. As Frege says, it is 'property of many people' (1892: 29). The third element in the picture is the image on the retina of the person viewing the moon. Frege says this is analogous to the idea (*Vorstellung*) in their mind, and the idea plays no part in what constitutes the thought (*Gedanke*) or proposition; nor, if Dummett is right, does it play any part in what constitutes the 'grasp' of the thought. (More on 'ideas' in section 4 below.)

Anti-psychologism about meaning can now be loosely expressed in terms of Frege's three-fold distinction. It is the view that meaning, communication and understanding involve only sense and reference, and not 'ideas' in Frege's use of that word. In order to understand meaning and communication, all that we need to appeal to are the objective referents of our words in the world, and the objective thoughts they express. The error of psychologism about meaning, on this conception, is to think that meaning (and communication, understanding etc.) has anything to do with

ideas. This is why Dummett attributes to psychologism the ‘confusion’ between what constitutes a grasp of sense – our relation to thoughts – and the processes by means of which we come to acquire this grasp. These processes might involve ‘mental imagery’ and such things (‘ideas’), but these things should not be allowed to ‘invade’ the theory of meaning.

The theory of meaning is sometimes called semantics, and at the heart of semantics is the notion of truth. A compositional semantics for a language demonstrates how the semantic properties of whole sentences (in particular, truth and falsehood) are determined by the semantic properties of their parts (either truth and falsehood in the case of sentences, or other referents in the case of other types of term). What is semantically relevant is only what determines truth-value. Anything else – ‘tone’, ‘colouring’ or ‘ideas’ – is not relevant to semantics.

Compositional principles tell us how the parts of sentences join together to form something assessable as true or false. Predication is fundamental in these constructions. As Quine put it:

Predication joins a general term and singular terms to form a sentence that is true accordingly as the general term is true of the object to which the singular terms refer. (Quine 1960: 96)

Other theories offer explanations of how this comes about. Frege’s theory of predicates (and their referents) as unsaturated is one attempt at an explanation. Montague and his followers (e.g. Lewis 1970) offer another. (See Davidson (2005) for

a penetrating discussion.) My interest here, however, is not in the details of these approaches but to draw attention to this conception of the semantic as *the realm of the determination of truth-value*.

Frege himself made this explicit. On his view, the bearers of truth-value are thoughts: and a thought is 'that for which the question of truth arises' (Frege 1918-19). Thoughts, like sentences, have a structure: they are made up of senses. But thoughts are also the 'contents' of sentences, and of the judgements that assertions of sentences express. Judgements of course are judgements that something is the case, or is true, so of course the content of a judgement – what is judged – is something for which the question of truth arises.

As well as its use in the theory of meaning (or semantics) the notion of 'content' is also used in the philosophy of mind, in the theory of intentionality or mental representation. 'Content' is a technical term and there is no agreed characterization of the notion of the content of an intentional state. My own definition (Crane 2009), which I think is as good as any at capturing all the various things that the term is used for, is that the content of a state is the way it represents its object. Many theories of intentionality take intentional content to be propositional: that is, they take intentional states to be those with propositional content. Propositional content is truth-evaluable content.

If anti-psychologism about *meaning* is the view that questions about meaning should only be answered by using notions like Frege's notions of sense and reference (or notions akin to these), then a parallel anti-psychologism about *intentionality* holds that that questions about intentional content should only be answered by appealing to

these notions. To echo Dummett: anti-psychologism about intentionality is the opposition of the infection of the theory of intentionality with notions like mental imagery. Intentionality should be understood in terms of sense and reference, not in terms of 'ideas'.

We can put the issue more precisely. If the content of intentional representation is propositional, then anti-psychologism about intentionality is the view that a theory of content is theory of what determines the truth or falsehood (or the conditions for the truth and falsehood) of these propositional representations. In other words, a theory of intentional content is a semantic theory, in the sense just introduced. Such a theory should explain how the truth-values of intentional states is determined by the semantic properties and relations (e.g. reference) of the significant parts of intentional states: it should give (e.g.) a compositional semantics for intentional states or their contents. Given this, and the assumption that all intentional content is propositional, anti-psychologism about intentionality is the view that an account of intentionality only needs to appeal to semantic facts about the mind.

Of course, the term 'semantic' is sometimes used as a synonym for 'intentional' – to mean anything having to do with mind-world relations – and if the term is used in that way then anti-psychologism becomes trivial. But I am using the term 'semantic' as it is used to talk about semantic theories of natural language and/or formal semantics. In these contexts, the main goal is to have a theory of the determination of truth-value (see Evans 1982: 8). But it seems to me that it worth distinguishing the very idea of representation (whether mental, linguistic, pictorial etc.) from the idea of

a truth-evaluable representation. This is why I reserve the term 'semantic' for a theory of the latter.

Anti-psychologism about intentionality is a species of anti-psychologism about the psychological, in the sense I outlined above (§1). There I said that anti-psychologism was the view that the philosophical study of the mind is a purely conceptual investigation. I take a semantics of propositional attitude attributions to be a purely conceptual investigation in the broad sense that it can be constructed by a theorist on the basis of their grasp of the concepts involved in the attribution. Anti-psychologism about intentionality treats the theory of intentional as, in effect, deriving from the semantics of propositional attitude attributions.

There are many motivations for anti-psychologism about the intentional, some of which may be related to Frege's ideas about communication, or to the idea (often attributed to Wittgenstein) that facts about our mental lives should be in some sense 'publicly accessible'. If the contents of intentional states are propositional in nature, and propositions are what is expressed in communicative acts, then these contents are in principle publicly accessible. Many people can 'grasp' the same content and there is no hidden, private 'residue' which in principle escapes communication or expression.

But as I mentioned above, a commitment to anti-psychologism about the intentional is not restricted to followers of Wittgenstein, or to those who are worried about the problem of other minds or about the 'privacy' of the mental. In fact, many contemporary theories of intentional content have anti-psychologistic elements, in the sense I have just explained. It is for this reason too that anti-psychologism is worth the attention of contemporary theories of mind. Here are a few illustrations.

To begin with, consider the reductionist view of intentionality championed by Fodor and others in the 1980s. This view attempted to make sense of the propositional attitudes in terms of a language of thought. Their starting point was that beliefs and desires (the supposed paradigms of intentional states) are relations to propositions, and propositions are abstract objects. What was needed, in Field's phrase, was a 'materialistically acceptable account of the relationship between an organism and a proposition' (Field 1978: 9). The account involved two projects: the first is to hypothesize a system of internal representations or sentences in a language of thought; the second is to explain how these sentences get their meaning, by giving a semantics for this language of thought. This approach to intentionality as an anti-psychologistic element, in the sense just defined above, because it explains intentionality in terms of the semantics of sentences.

More relevant to my interests here, though, are the more recent intentionalist theories of consciousness, such as those of Tye (1995), Byrne (2001) and others. According to these views, the phenomenal character of a conscious experience is identical to its representational/intentional content. (A weaker alternative is that the phenomenal character supervenes on intentional content; but the difference between these views is of no significance here.) The representational content of an experience is a proposition which expresses how the experience represents the world to be. Hence the intentionality of consciousness is explained purely in terms of the propositional content of experiences. What is essential to propositions, as I emphasized above, is the fact that they are bearers of truth-value. Hence this form of

intentionalism is a form of anti-psychologism: intentional content is truth-evaluable content.

Another, but very different, anti-psychologistic view of experience is John McDowell's famous view in *Mind and World* (1994) that what we perceive to be the case is also the kind of thing that we can judge. When we perceive that, for example, a particular pig is in the garden, this is something that can be the case or not the case. We can also judge that a particular pig is in the garden. The content of a judgement can be the content of a perception too. This is an essential step in McDowell's (1994) account of how experience can justify belief. (He has since given up this view of the content of experience: see McDowell 2008, and Crane 2012 §1 for a discussion.)

There are, then, a number of contemporary views of the intentionality of experience which count anti-psychologistic by my criteria. The essence of these views is that the content of experience is propositional, and that conscious perceptual experience is a matter of propositional representation of the world. However, some philosophers who explicitly reject intentionalism about consciousness, and even reject the idea that perception has propositional content, come close to endorsing very similar views. An example is Tyler Burge's recent account of perception in *Origins of Objectivity* (2010). Burge claims there that 'perception is not propositional and hence is not thought' and that 'perception lacks propositional structure' (2010: 36). He concludes from this that 'perceptual attributives are not concepts'. An 'attributive', for Burge, is something attributed by perceptual states to the objects of perception. So, on Burge's view, although it does not involve predication in the sense that linguistic or propositional representations do, perception does involve the attribution of properties.

The attribution of properties by the visual system can be correct or incorrect, depending on whether things are as they are visually represented to be: 'perceptual representational contents constitute accuracy conditions' (Burge 2010: 83).

To illustrate what this means, consider Burge's example of the visual representation of a cylindrical solid:

There are two aspects of perceptual representational content of the state -- general and singular. The singular aspect functions fallibly to single out (refer to) perceived particulars. When successful, the perceptual state refers to a particular cylindrical solid and perhaps to particular instances of cylindricality and solidity. The general aspect in the representational content functions fallibly to group or categorize particulars by attributing some indicated kind, property or relation to them. When successful, the perceptual state attributes cylindrical solidity to a particular cylindrical solid. (Burge 2010: 83)

Burge makes a distinction here between singular and the general aspects of content, which seems to correspond to the distinction between a singular and a general term (or concept). The singular and general aspects function as referring and predicating components of the content: the singular aspect picks something out and the general aspect groups or categorizes it.

While Burge has good reasons for denying that perceptual content is conceptual, it is hard to see why he denies that it is propositional, given the obvious similarity between what he says is going on in perception and simple cases of



predication. What Burge says is going on in this case of visual perception is strikingly similar the paradigmatic form of a predication (as described in the quotation from Quine above). There is a singular 'aspect' which refers to a particular, and there is a general 'aspect' which classifies it. And the resulting accuracy condition – that a certain perceived solid has the property of being cylindrical – looks very much like a proposition.

Whether or not perceptual content actually has this kind of structure, and what sense can be made of the idea of a perceptual state 'attributing' properties, are empirical and theoretical questions which I will not pursue here (but see Crane 2012). The point I want to make here is that this picture of perception is not forced upon us by the mere idea that perception is intentional, that it involves the representation of reality. The idea that this is the way perception must be would follow if we adopted the anti-psychologistic assumption that intentionality can only be understood in semantic terms. But this is the assumption which I am trying to undermine.

The apparent inevitability of the semantic conception of intentionality has, I think, another consequence regarding the intelligibility of intentionalist theories of consciousness. Burge himself has expressed strong scepticism about such theories; indeed, he thinks that there cannot be any kind of explanatory or necessary connection between perception and consciousness ('I think perception can, and apparently does, occur without any sort of consciousness' 2010: 368). Certainly, there can be unconscious perception – in the sense of the registration of information about the environment – and this is not denied by intentionalists about perceptual consciousness. Their concern is with a mature subject's perceptual experience: their

claim is that the phenomenal character of such an experience is determined by its intentionality. And yet if intentionality were only understood in the semantic sense – as propositional representation – then it can be hard to see why one should believe this claim. For there seems nothing in the idea of propositional representation *as such* that has anything to do with consciousness. In this sense, Burge is right. However, I think what is at fault here is not intentionalism, but the anti-psychologistic conception of intentional content (see Crane 2012).

I hope I have said something to indicate how widespread anti-psychologistic assumptions about intentionality are. But this just raises the question: if the intentional is not the same as the semantic, then what else might it be? What is intentionality if not propositional representation?

To answer this question, I would like first to return briefly to Frege, and his conception of 'ideas'. Where do ideas fit in to the present debate about intentionality?

### **3. Frege on ideas**

As mentioned above, Frege's interest was in logic and the determination of truth and falsehood. He had no substantive theory of the psychological – of what it takes to 'grasp' a thought, or of what ideas are, or of what consciousness is. His main concern to emphasise that logic was not about ideas. Ideas, then, must be distinguished between concepts (the referents of what we now call 'predicates'). So in the *Grundlagen* he writes: 'I have used the word "idea" always in the psychological sense, and have distinguished ideas from concepts and from objects' (Frege 1884: §10). And in his much later essay, 'The Thought', he says that 'what is a content of my

consciousness, my idea, should be sharply distinguished from what is an object of my thought' (Frege 1918-19: 72). The object of a thought is the reference, the item in the world; the idea is the content of consciousness.

One of Frege's concerns in 'The Thought' is to argue for this realistic assumption that the objects of our thoughts are things in the world and must not be confused with ideas. (It is worth pointing out that the paper was originally published in a journal for the study of German idealism: *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus*.) Similarly, thoughts themselves must be distinguished from ideas. One of the distinguishing marks of ideas is that they need a bearer:

the sense impression I have of green exists only because of me, I am its bearer.

It seems absurd to us that a pain, a mood, a wish, should rove around the world without a bearer, independently. An experience is impossible without an experiencer. The inner world presupposes the person whose inner world it is.

(Frege 1918-19: 67)

Ideas, then, are the inhabitants of the 'inner world': they are subjective entities in the sense that they are dependent for their existence on the particular subject of the idea. In essence, Frege's point is just that ideas are concrete mental states or episodes, rather than abstract objects, inhabitants of what he called the third realm.

But it would be a mistake to assimilate them, because of this, to subjective entities as conceived by contemporary philosophy: for example, to those things some

philosophers call 'qualia'. As Frege makes clear, ideas are not qualia in the normal philosophical sense, but ordinary folk psychological mental states:

the inner world of sense-impressions, of creations of [the] imagination, or sensations, of feelings and moods a world of inclinations, wishes and decisions ... I want to collect all these, with the exception of decisions, under the word 'idea'. Frege (1918-19: 66)

Sense-impressions, imaginings, inclinations are wishes are all unproblematically intentional states: they are all states or episodes with intentional content. One can have the visual impression of a pig, one can imagine a pig, one can be inclined to stroke a pig, and one can wish for a fat pig as a present. Whether feelings and moods are intentional states may be a more controversial matter, depending on exactly what one has in mind when talking about feelings and moods. But even so, it is worth emphasising that there is some debate about this: at least some of the things we call feelings and moods have some intentional content, and whether they all do does not affect Frege's initial classification of them as ideas.

It should not be surprising that Fregean ideas are intentional: the word Frege uses here is 'Vorstellung', familiar in philosophy to readers of Kant and his followers. English translations of Kant typically render 'Vorstellung' as *representation*. In some later writers, such as Brentano, 'Vorstellung' is translated into English as *presentation*. Representation and presentation are sometimes used as synonyms for 'intentionality', or as ways of explaining that concept. Some writers (Searle 1983; McDowell 1984)

see an important difference between something's being presented and something's being represented. There may well be such differences between the concepts expressed by the English words 'representation' and 'presentation', but I very much doubt that these differences can be traced to any differences in the use of 'Vorstellung' by Kant, Brentano or Frege.

So Fregean ideas are not qualia, but ordinary psychological states with intentional content. Although genuine perception might involve a propositional content ('thought') but he insists that 'for the sensible perception of things we should need sense-impressions as well, and these belong entirely to the inner world' (1918-19: 75). Sense-impressions are ideas, and belong to the inner world in the innocuous sense that they belong to a subject's conscious life.

I conclude that Frege was not anti-psychologistic about the intentional (in my sense) and in this respect, his view is preferable to that of some of his followers. I mention this not because I want to appeal to the authority of Frege, but to illustrate that even someone who is motivated by the claim that some mental acts have semantically evaluable, propositional, publicly available, 'objective' contents can also hold that some do not, and that these can be as fully intentional as the others. Not all intentionality need be a semantic matter. The theory of intentionality need not simply be the theory of propositional content.

#### **4 Psychologism about intentionality**

If we are interested in moving beyond a merely semantic account of intentionality, we can appeal to two features of 'ideas' as Frege discusses them. The first is that ideas

are subjective states or episodes. The investigation of intentional states need not then be limited to their propositional contents (if they have them) but also to the nature of their psychological ‘mode’ or ‘attitude’ – the nature of memory, of attention, of imagination and so on. Inevitably, then, such a study must move beyond the merely conceptual to the empirical study of psychological modes. This is not a different subject-matter from the study of intentionality: the difference between memory and imagination, for example, is a difference in the way these states represent their objects, it is a difference in their intentionality. A theory that wants to ground consciousness in intentionality, then, should be allowed to appeal to facts about intentional modes or attitudes as well as contents (see Chalmers 2004; Crane 2009).

It might be said that these differences are merely differences in ‘vehicles’ of intentionality, and not relevant to the theory of intentional content. But there is no generally accepted version of the distinction between ‘vehicle’ and ‘content’ which is neutral between psychologism and anti-psychologism. The clearest account of the distinction appeals to an analogy with language: the same message can be conveyed in different sentences, and to that extent the sentences are different ‘vehicles’ for the same content. But unless we think that a theory of intentional content should be modeled on a theory of the semantics of sentences, we will not be tempted by this way of drawing the distinction. The difference between visualizing and seeing something is certainly a psychological and a phenomenological difference; but there is no good reason to assimilate this difference to the difference between different sentences and their contents.

The second lesson we can draw from Frege’s discussion is that states of mind (‘ideas’) can have intentional content without being propositional attitudes. If I

imagine a pig in the garden, does my imagining have a propositional content? In some cases perhaps – if asked to imagine that there is a pig in my garden when there plainly is not, I am asked to imagine something false. But I might imagine a pig being in my garden – merely visualizing it, calling it to mind – without imagining *that* there is a pig in my garden, that is, without imagining anything that is false. Other cases (wanting, looking for etc.) can be treated in similar ways.

In any case, even when a state of mind has propositional content, it is not plausible that all aspects of the phenomenology of perceptual experience are determined by what determines this content (or its correctness-, accuracy-, or truth-condition). Blurred vision or objects in shadow are examples where either facts about a subject's visual experience, or facts about the illumination of objects, can give rise to differences in how things seem visually, which are not differences in the correctness conditions of the objects of visual perception. But these differences can still be aspects of the intentionality of experience: what is given or conveyed to the subject in experience

It is true that the psychologistic project as I have outlined it does begin with categories that are broadly speaking part of our folk psychology: memory, desire, imagination and so on. This, it seems to me, is the starting point for any philosophy of mind, as well as for psychology. Where psychologism departs from the standard non-psychologistic philosophy of mind is that it allows for two possibilities:

- (1) There can be more to the intentionality of psychological states than is given by an account of propositional attitude attributions; and
- (2) There can also be less to the intentionality of psychological states than is given by an account of propositional attitude attributions.

The significance of (1) has already been touched on above. An account of intentionality should incorporate a psychological account of the psychological modes (vision, imagination, memory etc) as well as an account of their propositional contents, if they have them.

The second commitment, claim (2), needs a little more explanation. The idea is that our folk psychological descriptions of thoughts can make more distinctions than there are distinctions in mental reality. A few examples would be useful. One is Dretske's (1969) famous distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic seeing. There is a well-established distinction between the way we describe visual cognition in epistemic terms (' $x$  sees that  $p$ ') and in non-epistemic terms (' $x$  sees  $y$ '). The distinction is important and its logical and semantic features have been much investigated. But does the existence of this distinction mean that there are two kinds of *seeing*, that is, two kinds of psychological state or episode? Psychologists have distinguished, for example, between different visual pathways corresponding to the different functions of vision (see Milner and Goodale 1992). But neither this, nor other psychological distinctions, correspond to Dretske's distinction. Dretske's distinction is a conceptual or semantic one; it does not correspond to a distinction in psychological reality.

Another example is the well-worked distinction between '*de re*' and '*de dicto*' attributions of mentality. When considering Quine's famous example of Ralph and whether or not he believes that Bernard J. Ortcutt is a spy, many will agree that although Ralph does not believe that Ortcutt is a spy, he does believe of Ortcutt that he is a spy (Quine 1956). Many will agree that this requires us to distinguish two



'senses' of belief: belief *de dicto* and belief *de re*. In the *de dicto* sense, Ralph does not have the belief that Orcutt is a spy; in the *de re* sense he does believe of Orcutt that he is a spy.

The distinction is perfectly intelligible, and makes sense of some aspects of the complex business of attitude ascriptions. But should we draw a similar distinction between different kinds of *belief* states, as Tyler Burge (1977) and others have done? Why should these differences in our ways of talking lead us to assume a difference in mental state? One might expect that if there were such a fundamental distinction between kinds of mental state, that it would show up somewhere in cognitive psychological studies. But as Dennett (1982) pointed out, the *de re/de dicto* distinction does not appear anywhere in psychology; and things have not changed significantly since he made that point thirty years ago.

Let me make it explicit what I am saying here. I am not saying that there is no value in the project of giving a systematic account of the semantics or pragmatics of propositional attitude attributions. Of course there is; but this project is distinct from the project of understanding intentionality. Nor am I saying that philosophers should not speculate about mental states or capacities which are not theorized about in psychology. This depends entirely on the individual case. What I am saying is that we should not assume that the 'joints' of mental reality correspond to the distinctions made in our ascriptions. We should not rely on our ascriptions as the sole guide to where these joints lie. Once again, Dennett puts it well: 'our very capacity to engage in linguistic interactions ... seriously distorts our profile as intentional systems, by

producing illusions of much more definition in our operative systems of mental representation than we actually have' (Dennett 1983).

## **5. Conclusion**

I use the label 'anti-psychologism' for the general idea that the philosophical study of the mind can only be a study of our mentalistic concepts – either through a conceptual analysis, a grammatical investigation, a semantics of propositional attitude ascriptions, an account of the nature of propositional content, or in some other way. The notion of propositional content has played a particularly important role in the anti-psychologism of recent analytic philosophy of intentionality, and it is this idea in particular is one that I have criticized here.

In my initial characterization of anti-psychologism, I identified significant similarities between the approaches to mind and meaning described by Cavell, Dummett and McDowell. I then connected Cavell's idea of 'undoing the psychologizing of psychology' with the Frege-inspired idea of a theory of meaning as a theory of mind-independent 'propositions' or 'thoughts'. I then argued that this idea has an obvious affinity with the theory of intentionality as the theory of the propositional content of mental states. I claimed that whatever its merits as a theory of meaning, the theory of intentionality cannot simply be a theory of propositional content, and *a fortiori* nor can it be the semantics of propositional attitude attributions. The overall diagnosis I would offer of how we got into this situation is that the philosophy of mind has concerned itself with only what I call 'conceptual investigation'. Psychologism, as I conceive of it, is the rejection of this.

Obviously, there are risks in identifying large trends in ideas in this kind of way. The connections between these different ideas are not supposed to be deductive or necessary. Rather, my hypothesis is a (fairly abstract) historical conjecture of how ideas about meaning have given rise to a certain conception of intentionality. Someone may doubt this conjecture. Or they may doubt the specific connections I have claimed there are between Cavell's anti-psychologism and Frege-inspired semantics. Or they may doubt that there is a connection between Frege's views about the 'objectivity' of sense and the propositionalist view of intentionality which I have been criticizing. To make these connections more robust would need more defence than I have been able to give in the very sketchy remarks above; nonetheless, I think that this can be done.

What cannot be doubted, though, is that thinking about intentionality in recent analytic philosophy has been dominated by thinking about the propositional attitudes, and an account of the intentionality of these attitudes has been conceived of as an account of their propositional content. This is what I have labeled 'anti-psychologism about intentionality' and this has been the main target of this paper. I have argued that if we do not start from the starting-points about intentionality identified above, then the possibility of a broader, more realistic conception of intentionality begins to emerge. I hope that the essays in this book will serve as examples of what such a conception might look like.<sup>1</sup>

Peterhouse  
Cambridge  
CB2 1RD  
[www.timcrane.com](http://www.timcrane.com)

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on my plenary address to the 7th European Congress for Analytical Philosophy in Milan in September 2011. Other versions have been presented to the Brazilian Society for the Philosophy of Mind in Fortaleza, to an audience in Fribourg in April 2012, to the ‘Minds, Bodies and Problems’ conference in Bilkent in June 2012 and to the LEMMings Graduate Conference in Cologne in December 2012. I am grateful to the audience on these occasion for comments, but especially to Andrea Giananti, Katalin Farkas, Barry C Smith and Marcus Wild.