

Can Wittgenstein's Philosophy account for Uncertainty in Introspection?

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Abstract: What happens when we are uncertain about what we want, feel or wish for? How should we understand uncertainty in introspection? This paper reconstructs and critically assess two answers to this question frequently found in the secondary literature on Wittgenstein: indecision and self-deception (Hacker 1990, 2012; Glock 1995, 1996). Such approaches seek to explain uncertainty in introspection in a way which is completely distinct from uncertainty about the 'outer world'. In doing this, I argue, such accounts fail to provide an exhaustive explanation of uncertainty in introspection. In particular, they fail to account for the substantial role the intellect seems to play in the process of resolving such uncertainties. Accordingly, I sketch a reading of Wittgenstein centred around his remarks connecting psychological phenomena to public behaviour (e.g. PI 2009: 243ff., 580), which allows for the possibility of uncertainty in introspection and, moreover, accounts for the intellectual effort which often goes into knowing what one wants or feels.

1. Introduction

In the wake of the private language arguments, Wittgenstein famously claims that doubt about one's own sensations, such as pain, is grammatically excluded (PI 2009: 246). In doing so, he does not follow the classical tradition dating back to Descartes, which states that we cannot err in introspection because of a certain 'immediate access' to the mental objects in our subjective realm (Glock 1995: 233f.). Quite conversely, Wittgenstein thinks uncertainty can only arise in cases where we can be right or wrong, as it is the case with descriptions of states of affairs (Glock 1995: 307; Child 2011: 169). According to him, expressions of pain, feelings, thoughts, wishes etc., are not descriptions, but 'avowals' (Glock 1996: 51). Such avowals cannot be true or false—at least not in the sense we know from descriptions, i.e. being verifiable through observation (Z 1967: 472). Consequently, it does not make sense to ask if someone is sure whether they are in pain: the "expression of doubt has no place in the language-game" (PI 2009: 288). In Wittgenstein's view uncertainty—and with this also the concept of knowledge (PPF 2009: 315)—is ruled out in introspection not because of the infallibility of a 'mental eye' but because of the rules of our language (Hacker 1990: 51).

Whereas his scepticism about knowledge of one's own sensations, emotions (Z 1967: 487) and volitions (PI 2009: 585) has been studied in detail, there is much less literature on the question of how a Wittgensteinian approach to situations of *uncertainty* about one's mental life – or as I will call it,

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“uncertainty in introspection” – would look like.¹ This is surprising, as an intuitive objection to this view on avowals is to simply point to the common experience of being uncertain about what one feels or wants. Undoubtedly, we are often very unsure about what we wish for, we ponder different options, sometimes even despair because of indecisiveness. Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa takes this feeling to the extreme when he lets his alter ego Bernardo Soares write “And I don’t know what I feel, I don’t know what I want to feel, I don’t know what I think or what I am” (Pessoa 1982: Fragment 41). Also outside literature such uncertainties are frequent: Do I feel love or simply attraction?, Is this attraction or just fascination?, Is what I feel genuine interest or do I *want* to be interested? Questions such as those are not just common but also generally regarded as important. They can be said to be part of what Cassam calls “substantial self-knowledge” (2014: 28ff.). However, if utterances expressing such feelings and intentions are not descriptions but indubitable avowals, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest, how is uncertainty about them possible?

This paper seeks to answer this question by exploring different approaches to uncertainty in introspection in line with Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. I will proceed as follows: In the next section I reconstruct Wittgenstein’s claim that uncertainty concerning one’s own sensations is excluded by elaborating on the conceptual relations Wittgenstein identifies between the concepts of knowledge, observation and uncertainty. The third section is concerned with illuminating the contrast between the idea that avowals are *in general* indubitable and the ordinary experience of being uncertain about what one feels or wants. In the fourth and fifth section I reconstruct and critically assess two ways of resolving this tension: indecision and self-deception (Hacker 1990; Glock 1995, 1996). Committed to Wittgenstein’s criticism of the concept of the ‘mental object’ (e.g. PI 2009: 36) these approaches explain uncertainty in introspection mostly as being “altogether unlike” (Hacker 1990: 200) uncertainty about the outer world. Specifically, they rule out any substantial role of the intellect in the process of coming to know one’s mind. In doing this, I argue, such accounts fail to provide an exhaustive explanation of uncertainty in introspection (cf. Lawlor 2009: 49, 57-9). In particular, they fail to account for the substantial role the intellect seems to play in the process of resolving such uncertainties. Accordingly, I sketch a reading of Wittgenstein centred around his remarks connecting psychological phenomena to public behaviour (e.g. PI 2009: 243ff., 580), which allows for the possibility of uncertainty in introspection and, moreover, accounts for the intellectual effort which often goes into knowing what one wants or feels.

¹ Sorgiovanni (forthcoming) and Gauvry (2017) are recent exceptions. Regarding terminology, I follow Shoemaker and Moran in that with “introspection” I do not want to imply a perceptual model of self-knowledge. Instead, I mean it to denote the host of activities involving expression of and reflection about one’s own mental life (cf. Shoemaker 1996; Moran 2001, p. 135 fn. 15).

2. Proper observations and no observations at all

In order to assess the “Wittgensteinian” approaches to uncertainty in introspection it is vital to understand how exactly Wittgenstein differentiates between the inner and the outer. A crucial role in this respect can be attributed to the idea of an “observation in the proper sense” (BBB 1958: 174-6; cf. PPF 2009: 67-9). This concept plays a key role in Wittgenstein’s treatment of knowledge and description (Child 2017: 470). To put it simply: according to Wittgenstein, we can only talk of ‘real’ knowledge when there is an observation in the proper sense (Glock 1995: 236). Such observations are characterised by the fact that they are fallible (Child 2017: 473) and do not modify or produce their object (PPF 2009: 62, BBB 1958: 174). Wittgenstein writes: “I do not ‘observe’ that which comes into being only through observation” (PPF 2009: 67). Thus, an observation in the proper sense is associated with the following three conditions:

- (C1) The observation is fallible.
- (C2) The correctness of the observation is not guaranteed by the observation taking place.
- (C3) The object of the observation is independent of the observation, i.e. (a) its existence and (b) its properties do not depend and are not influenced by the observation.²

Wittgenstein’s primary example for an alleged observation, which turns out to be no observation at all, is the expression of pain. First, exclamations such as “I am in pain” are typically neither fallible nor dubitable. Normally there is no possibility of error, since there is neither identification nor interpretation taking place (PI 2009: 289f.). Consider feeling a throbbing pain in the front of one’s head. Here, the possibility of error is not evident: Certainly, I could misname my pain-sensation and, perhaps, to call it “stabbing” would have been more appropriate. Additionally, I could be mistaken in the location of my pain. Suppose that upon closer consideration it turned out that it is rather the lateral area of my head which hurts. However, in such cases it is unclear whether these are actually instances of misidentification. Could it not be that the pain itself has changed?

According to one view, Wittgenstein claims that if I feel a throbbing pain in the front area of my head, I have *that* and if I feel a stabbing pain in the lateral area of my head, I have *this* (Glock 1995). On this account, it is not possible to have a certain sensation and not notice it. Feeling a throbbing pain in the front of my head implies having such a pain. In this case, feeling pain is a *necessary and sufficient*

² Note that these three conditions are in close logical relation to each other, without being equivalent. To be precise, (C3) implies (C2) and if (C2) is violated, then neither (C1) nor (C3) holds. Furthermore, they are not meant to capture exhaustive and sufficient conditions for the term “observation in the proper sense”. Rather, these can be identified in Wittgenstein’s writings and are of importance for the present discussion.

condition for being in pain (Glock 1995: 236; Hill 1991: 127). Thus, normal expressions of pain violate (C2), implying a violation of (C1).

Second, it has been noted that whenever I concentrate my attention on my mental state, it changes (cf. Comte 1830; Hill 1991: 120 ff.): there are obvious differences between mourning and paying attention to one's mourning. If I concentrate my attention on my pain, it will feel different than if I try to distract myself from it. Here, the alleged observation modifies its object, which goes against (C3b).³

Third, it may be argued that the case of pain violates condition (C3a), since it is 'produced' in the sense that without the *possibility* of expressing pain in the way we do, it is questionable if the concept of pain would even exist (PI 2009: 296, 304-5). On a number of occasions, Wittgenstein stresses the importance of normal pain-behaviour for the concept formation of pain (PI 2009: 244, 384; Child 2017). Acquiring the concept of pain involves training in the correct application of our pain vocabulary, learning when to say "Ouch", when to treat people in pain with empathy, how to differentiate sincere from insincere pain-behaviour (PI 2009: 358ff.), etc.. Without the ability to engage in this criterial pain-behaviour, pain, as we know it, would not exist.

Arguably, this is controversial in the case of basic instances of pain, e.g. hurting your foot. However, when we consider a throbbing headache, it seems reasonable to assume some form of concept-dependence, as feeling a throbbing headache presupposes mastery of the concept of a *throbbing* pain. In particular, it requires being able to distinguish a throbbing pain from other types of pains, e.g. stabbing ones. Without the appropriate sensory vocabulary, it is unclear if one can feel a pain which is explicitly throbbing, rather than just feeling pain (cf. Moran 2001: 40f., Child 2011). If that is the case, then being able to identify ('observe') a pain as throbbing alters its properties, thereby violating (C3b).

Following Wittgenstein, we have to conclude that in the case of pain there is no independent object of observation. To feel pain is not to observe pain. Consequently, to say "I am in pain" is not the result of an observation in the proper sense. According to Wittgenstein, then, in such cases there can neither be knowledge nor uncertainty (PI 2009: 244, 288).

While Wittgenstein's discussion of the sensation of pain (PI 2009: 244ff.) is probably the most elaborate of his explorations into the "grammar" of our psychological vocabulary, he also advanced related arguments about intentions (PI 2009: 545, 574, 583f.) and emotions such as joy, grief or fear (PPF 2009: 1ff., 74ff.). A common theme in these passages is that he argues against conceiving of psychological phenomena as 'mental objects' (PI 2009: 36), which can be observed and reported. Rather, he wants us to see such utterances as behavioural reactions, i.e. "signals" (PI 2009: 180) embedded in a wider human practise. Crucially, this practise of avowing, i.e. *expressing* one's inner, bears fundamental

³ There is a related discussion about how becoming conscious of one's beliefs, emotions, wishes etc., alters their character (cf. Nussbaum 1990: 279; Moran 2001).

differences to the epistemic practise of *describing* an observation in the proper sense (Child 2011). Through this, Wittgenstein argues, we come to see some of the long-lasting philosophical problems concerned with the mind as mere chimeras (PI 2009: 94), and they dissolve as we get a clear overview of the grammar of our psychological vocabulary (PPF 2009: 315).

Supported by certain remarks of Wittgenstein (Z 1967: 472, 488), some commentators have generalized these considerations into an ‘avowal-theory of the inner’ where psychological self-ascriptions are indubitable avowals *in general* (Hacker 1990, 2012; Glock 1996; Wright 1998). Ascribing this theory to Wittgenstein is questionable from an exegetical standpoint: First, an approach which takes Wittgenstein to argue in favour of the ‘theory’ that expressions of one’s mental life are *in general* avowals and hence indubitable goes against his reluctance to advance theories (PI 2009: 109; cf. Child 2017: 473) and his scepticism towards generalizations (e.g. PI 2009: 305; Hanfling 1989). Secondly, it is not clear, whether he fully supported such a view: certain cautious remarks (PPF 2009: 67-81; PI 2009: 296) indicate his support of a “spectrum of cases” (Hacker 1990: 196) between indubitable avowals and fallible descriptions (e.g. PPF 2009: 71). On some occasions he explicitly expresses the view that first-personal statements can be avowals *or* descriptions (PI 2009: 585-586, RPP 1980b: 156, 711, 728; cf. Gauvry 2017).

Nonetheless, most of Wittgenstein’s remarks on these topics are less wary of a potential spectrum between avowals and descriptions, which is not surprising given the fact that his main goal was neither to advance a theory of uncertainty in particular nor the mind in general. What he argues against is the application of the “Augustinian picture of language” (PI 2009: 1ff.) – the idea that each noun has a corresponding object and each verb a corresponding process – to our psychological vocabulary as this results in a version of Cartesianism which needs to assume ‘mysterious’ mental objects exclusively available to the subject alone (Child 2017: 466-9; Hacker 1990: 46-62, 272ff.; Wright 1998: 22-4).

Without getting too much into exegetical debates, the important corollary for the present discussion is that Wittgenstein seems to suggest that if a certain avowal is *not* the result of an observation in the proper sense, one cannot be uncertain about it – at least not in the sense of misidentification or misinterpretation (e.g. PPF 2009: 331; Child 2017: 473). Consequently, if there is uncertainty about it, for conceptual reasons it cannot involve the same kind of intellectual activity employed in an epistemic situation featuring an observation in the proper sense (Hacker 1990: 199ff, 2012: 155; Glock 1995: 247; Wright 1998: 15).

Even though much more could be said about these parts of Wittgenstein’s thinking (cf. Rust 1996), we are now in a position to see *how* exactly his thoughts on pain and their generalizations to other psychological phenomena seem to rule out uncertainty in introspection.

3. Two cases of uncertainty

As shown in the previous section, Wittgenstein appears to suggest that expressions of pain, fear, joy or one's wishes are indubitable *avowals* and not fallible *descriptions* of one's own mind. However, undoubtedly we are often uncertain about our own minds and we regard resolving it as important (cf. Schlegel et al. 2011). If uncertainty in introspection is indeed an important aspect of our mental life how then could anyone, including Wittgenstein, claim it to be impossible? To see this contrast more clearly, consider the following two examples:

- (A) I feel a strong friendly attraction towards you, but I do not love you.⁴
- (B) I want to study at University X but not at University Y.

In (A) we are faced with an expression of a feeling, while in (B) we are informed about an intention the speaker holds. If (A) and (B) were similar to “I am in pain”, then, following Wittgenstein, we would have to admit that uncertainty in such cases is not possible. This, however, represents a violation of our ordinary language use, since we definitely would say “I am unsure if I should study at University X or Y” and “I don't know if I simply feel friendly attraction towards you or if I love you”. To conclude that such expressions are simply senseless, would be against Wittgenstein's dictum that philosophy should “leave everything as it is” (PI 2009: 124). Thus, the problem presents itself as follows:

- (P1) In the context of certain avowals, such as „I am in pain“, uncertainty is excluded.
- (P2) There are avowals about which we *do* express uncertainty, such as (A) or (B).
- (P3) If we should take ordinary language use as an important reference for philosophy (PI 2009: 124), we cannot simply dismiss (P2) as irrelevant.

Therefore, we are forced to look for ways to reconcile (P1) with (P2). One answer to this problem is to infer that Wittgenstein's considerations only apply to a subset of all sentences concerning the inner. Rather than being uniform, the class of avowals contains a spectrum of cases ranging from clearly indubitable avowals to complex cases where uncertainty is possible (Child 2011). Saying this much leaves open what determines whether an avowal is indubitable or not.⁵

⁴ What kind of love (e.g. „being in love“, „loving“, „falling in love“, „being infatuated“, etc.) we are dealing with in (A) is intentionally unspecified and I do not attempt to differentiate between them here (cf. McNally 2016: 736). What example (A) is supposed to display is feeling affection towards someone, when this attraction does not quite surpass the ‘threshold’ for love—in any of its forms. Whatever kind of love it may be, „feeling friendly attraction” is meant to be something *less* strong. For a view on Wittgenstein's treatment of love see further Rust (1996: 209) and Raatzsch (2020) in this journal.

⁵ Some writers have suggested that it depends on the ‘complexity’ of the term in question (cf. Hacker 1990: 198, Moran 2001: 43; McNally 2016: 735ff.). On these views an avowal's dubitability is a function of whether the a concept is part of our basic range of expressions or requires more sophisticated emotional vocabulary. Child (2011: 267ff.) adds to this the idea that an

Another possibility is to maintain that even though there are differences between avowals, uncertainty in introspection is *fundamentally different* from uncertainty regarding the external world. On this view, uncertainty is ruled out because even avowals such as (A) or (B) are no observations in the proper sense, i.e. they do not satisfy conditions (C1)-(C3). This is supported by the observation that if I am sure that I want to go to University X or that I love someone, it seems that I cannot be mistaken. Consequently, multiple commentators conclude that uncertainty in introspection is “altogether unlike” (Hacker 1990: 200) uncertainty concerning what is outer (Glock 1996: 308; Wright 1998). Therefore, such accounts need to come up with explanations of uncertainty in cases such as (A) or (B) without assimilating these instances to uncertainty about the outer world. In the following sections I will discuss and evaluate two of them: indecision and self-deception. In this discussion I try to show that such approaches fall short of a full picture of uncertainty in introspection. In particular, they cannot accommodate for a substantial role of the intellect and thus fail to explain essential aspects of uncertainty about cases such as (A) or (B).

4. Uncertainty as indecision

The most prominent way of explaining uncertainty in introspection after Wittgenstein is to hold that it is mostly a matter of indecision. P.M.S. Hacker puts it like this:

Of course, we also say such things as “I don’t know what I want (think, intend)”; but this is not an expression of *ignorance* to be resolved by more careful introspection. Rather, it is an expression of the uncertainty of indecision, and what is requisite is *not information* about my desires (thoughts, intentions), but *resolution*. (Hacker 1990: 61, emphasis added).

On this account, if I am unsure where to study or whether I am in love, it is not that I am uncertain of how to interpret certain evidence or what conclusions to draw from it. It is not a statement of ignorance. Rather, I have not made up my mind yet. One is unsure how to *evaluate* different reasons for or against a certain action, and not how to perceive or interpret a pre-existing intention (cf. RPP 1980a: 815; Anscombe 1957). Thus, statements of uncertainty about one’s own intentions should not be understood as a proof that *pace* Wittgenstein the concept of a proper observation, uncertainty and knowledge apply in such instances. “I don’t know what I want” is not a sign of insufficient introspection, or failure to perceive one’s own will clearly. It is simply an *expression* of indecision like an indecisive facial expression or a reluctant gesture (Glock 1996: 308; Hacker 1990: 60ff.; 2012: 155).

avowal’s dubitability may depend on whether the concept expressed is acquired with language or pre-linguistically. This paper is not the right place to further explore these questions.

Certainly, this explanation of uncertainty is appropriate for a lot of situations and we would surely agree that if I don't know at which university I want to study, this is a matter of indecision. However, in a case such as (A), it seems strange to say, that I have not yet *decided* if I love you. This issues seems not concerned with what I want, but with what is the case. I want to *know* whether I love you or not; I do not take this as being under the control of my will (cf. Nussbaum 1990). Thus, regarding uncertainty in (A) it appears too quick to leave it with the diagnosis that there simply needs to be more resolution.

And also regarding (B) it is not as straight-forward as it appears. Of course, uncertainty in (B) is a sign of not having made up one's mind. Unlike in the case of love, here it seems that the subject *can* – indeed *must* – choose what they want. However, if that were everything there was to say about indecision, how shall we make sense of the *process* of making up one's mind? What are we doing, when we make up our minds? Are we merely trying to muster up courage or resolution? Sometimes, this is accurate. Yet, it seems undeniable that occasionally our intellect is heavily involved in trying to resolve indecision, i.e. we are trying to achieve *knowledge* of something in order to decide. Neglecting this aspect means failing to account for the complex process of making up one's mind.⁶ Again, Hacker writes:

“I don't know what I think” is an expression of an inability to judge (“I can't make up my mind”, we say) – not of an *introspective deficiency*. It is a confession of not knowing what to think, which can be remedied only by looking again at the *evidence*. [...] And finding out what one wants is not a matter of introspectively running over one's various desires, but rather of reflecting on the desirability characteristics of the available alternatives and choosing the most preferable. (Hacker 2012: 155, emphasis added)

To be undecided, according to Hacker, is sometimes a matter of not having examined the evidence thoroughly enough to arrive at a conclusion. Resolving uncertainty, then, would mean to look again at the “desirability characteristics” of the different options. Hacker then goes on to claim that in such a case it would be misleading to call this uncertainty in *introspection*, rather it should be thought of as uncertainty *about the world*.

Accordingly, the process of making up one's mind can be explained by the difficulties in determining which option is more desirable, based on their characteristics. Still, what does it depend on if one option is more desirable than another? Is it really the case that this does not involve some kind of “introspective deficiency”, as Hacker suggests? After all, it does not seem true that the question “Where do I want to study?” is exhaustively described by simply referring to the diagnosis that the decision-maker needs more resolution or by stating that they should inform themselves better about the different universities. A personal element appears to be missing from this picture.

⁶ Once at an international conference, a Wittgenstein scholar said to me that he believes that “really not much” is going on when we make up our minds. The Wittgensteinian insight that nothing *has* to be going on does not imply that there *is* nothing going on.

Consider again a case like (B), but where one university is known to be more competitive than the other. Clearly, how desirable a competitive environment is depends on whether the subject enjoys competition or not. Do I thrive in response to competition or do I withdraw from it? Such aspects of my character are important determinants of whether a competitive environment is desirable *for me*. This leads to a more general point: if I reflect on what I want, I do not merely contemplate the independent characteristic of the different options, but also *how I will respond to them*. To evaluate the objective properties of the alternatives is one thing, to judge how one will react to them, another. The desirability of the different options also involves my tendency to respond to them. Naturally, this can be a decisive reason in deliberation.

How, then, can I know if I am a person who likes competition? At this point, Wittgenstein's ideas on the social function of meaning prove insightful (cf. PI 2009: 154f., 258-270, 583). There, he makes clear that in order for a sign (including "being a competitive person") to acquire meaning, its use must be governed by public criteria. These criteria are expressed in rules which – without always clearly defining the term in question (PI 2009: 87) – enable us to distinguish between correct and incorrect applications. While for many psychological concepts these rules are less sharp and "constitutively uncertain" (Glock 1996: 177; Sorgiovanni forth.), character traits and personalities seem to be more clearly defined.⁷ Usually, we take the question of whether or not a person is competitive to have a straightforward answer. It seems intuitive to suppose that this answer depends on the person's past behaviour, their observed attitudes and reactions.

At this point, an alternative approach to indecision can be formulated: I can be uncertain about (B) because I do not know how I will react to a certain environment and in this respect, I do not know my character. The possibility of error in such a case seems guaranteed since I might *neglect* crucial past events and behavioural reactions constitutive of my character. I may very well think that I am an ambitious, competitive person, while in fact, I am not. Insofar as an avowal such as (B) is based on such beliefs, it depends on an observation in the proper sense. Consequently, resolving indecision in this case means coming to know which type of person one is and this involves a substantial intellectual effort similar to when we try to achieve knowledge about some phenomenon in the outer world.

The crucial difference between this understanding of uncertainty in introspection as indecision and the interpretation suggested by Hacker is that the former does not restrict the intellect's role in indecision and its (potential) abrogation. Explaining indecision does not stop with the need for more resolution or ignorance about the different alternatives. If indecision were reducible to a basic notion of lacking resolution or to an impersonal inquiry into the different options it could hardly account for the deeply personal and sometimes excruciating process of making up one's mind.

⁷ As a matter of fact, there is a large psychological literature on this topic, including William James' influential considerations of temperament (1907) and the classic experiment of Ash (1946), but also subsequent works (e.g. Gidron et al. 1993).

Being unsure what one wants can be due to ignorance about what kind of person one is. To call this anything other than a lack of self-knowledge would be misleading at least (cf. Cassam 2014: 29, 157ff.). From Wittgenstein's considerations about the correct application of a term being governed by the rules of our language it can be suspected that questions of personality may be answered by considering which ordinary descriptions one's behavioural patterns fall under (cf. Anscombe 1957; Hacking 1994: 234ff.). "I do not know what I want" is not simply a matter of lacking resolution but it *can* also be a matter of deficient knowledge—about the world *and* about myself.

Two related objections to this alternative reading are possible. First, one may argue that answering the question of what I want by looking at evidence, i.e. my past behavioural and personality traits corresponds to deferring responsibility for my choice (Moran 2001: 81ff.). This objection is justified in the sense that even if my personality and the properties of the universities would clearly speak in favour of one alternative, this does not mean that this *must* be what I want. I can responsibly choose to go to a competitive university, being fully aware that I am not a competitive person. Drawing on Sartre, Moran (2001: 77ff.) emphasizes that no empirical circumstances can force an intention to be in a certain way, every reason needs to be *endorsed* by the subject in order to guide its actions.

However, this objection is based on a misunderstanding of the claim I have been trying to advance. I do not wish to propose that indecision is completely resolvable by deference to one's character traits and past behavioural reactions. Rather, I am advocating the view that they can figure as prominent *reasons* for choices and thus play an important role in explaining indecisiveness: I *can* be uncertain about (B), because I am unsure of what my own character traits are. Resolving my indecision, then, involves coming to know which type of person I am, because this gives me important reasons for or against an alternative. None of this denies that making up one's mind may include a special kind of endorsement which is not deferrable to any type of evidence.

As a second objection one might point to the fact that we are able to imagine a certain scenario and register the emotional reactions we show, in order to reach a conclusion about what to do. If I am asking myself where to study, I might *visualize* myself in different locations and situations and see how that *feels*, so as to make my decision. In contrast to reflecting on past behavioural reactions, which amounts to putting oneself in the third-person perspective, imagining hypothetical cases is only possible from a first-person point of view. So far, the reading I have tried to sketch here appears unable to incorporate this specifically first-personal faculty of decision-making.

In responding to this, Lawlor's intriguing discussion of "internal promptings" proves insightful (Lawlor 2009: 56-61). In her 'inferentialist' account of self-knowledge, internal promptings such as images, impressions or inner voices feature as evidence. Assigning *causes* to such promptings is thought to represent a way of inferring from them what one wants. Lawlor's leading example consists of a mother which is wondering whether or not she wishes to have another child and hears an inner voice telling her

“Have another child”. Now, Lawlor argues that hearing a voice saying “Have another child” can be interpreted as being *caused* by her desire to have another child. Hence, the mother can come to know what she wants by reflecting on the possible causes for her internal promptings and inferring from this what her true intention is.

From a Wittgensteinian perspective, such internal promptings are intrinsically bound up with potential public behaviour (cf. PI 2009: 280, 370; Hacker 1990: 229ff.). Hearing a voice in one’s head saying “Have another child” is, on this view, necessarily connected to it being a potential object of public discourse. Crucially the person subject to this phenomenon *could* engage publicly in the criterial behaviour for being in the respective mental state, i.e. hearing a voice telling one to have another child. On this view, experiencing such promptings is not independent of public criteria. Following Wittgenstein, what one experiences in such a case is determined by which behaviour one *would* be able to show publicly (PI 2009: 580; cf. Gauvry 2017). Uncertainty, on the other hand, can arise through either being unsure what one can *truthfully* avow – a topic I will return to in the next section – or through being ignorant as to *how* one’s actual and potential avowals should be classified. To stay in Lawlor’s example, we can easily imagine the mother failing to realize that hearing this voice *is* actually a sign of wanting another child. Through talking with a friend, for example, she might *come to know* of this relationship between hearing such voices and wanting another child – without this forcing her to have any intention whatsoever.

In all these cases, Wittgenstein’s philosophy points us to the idea that uncertainty in introspection is related to the public actions one has and could have engaged in. In the next section, I will return to the idea of truthfulness in discussing a second common way of explaining uncertainty in introspection: self-deception.

5. Uncertainty as self-deception

The notion of truthfulness is of fundamental importance for Wittgenstein’s conception of avowals. In the case of avowals, truthfulness serves as a substitute for truth (Glock 1996: 53; Wright 1998: 14f.). Wittgenstein stresses on a number of occasions how being untruthful is a complex language-game which has to be learned and can only occur in the context of a fully developed human practice. It is as senseless to suppose that a new-born child’s smile is insincere as it is to do so with respect to a dog’s joy when it sees its master return (PI 2009: 249-250, PPF 2009: 363). This means that there are criteria to separate insincere from sincere behaviour, truthful from untruthful avowals, although only experience might allow us to tell one from the other (PPF 2009: 355).

To claim so for cases in the third person seems unproblematic, but does this also apply to the first person? Can I wonder if my own avowal was sincere? If this is possible, it could be a source of uncertainty in introspection; not the truth of an utterance about my own emotions, sensations and

volitions would be doubted, but its truthfulness (Glock 1996: 54). To doubt if I love you or not, would then correspond to the question if I am able to truthfully avow my love to you. In this spirit, Hacker argues that an avowal's

flaws are likely to be forms of *self-deception*, rooted in a defect of the will rather than of the intellect, let alone of the senses. One who deceives himself about his state of mind, his motives, or intentions may or may not also deceive others. But if he does, it will not be because he is truthfully reporting a mistaken *observation*, but because he is being untruthful – with himself, and so too with others. (Hacker 1990: 199, emphasis added)

If I am untruthful about my feelings it is not that I did not identify my emotions correctly or that I drew the wrong inferences from it. Rather, I am not able or willing to be honest. In a case such as (A) this account seems very plausible. If I say a sentence such as “I feel a strong friendly attraction towards you, but I do not love you”, I might be wrong, since I do not want to *accept* that I am in love. After the utterance, I can be uncertain if my avowal was indeed truthful. Now, Hacker seems to suggest that my avowal in this case is flawed not because I fail to *understand* what I actually feel when this person is around, but because I don't *want* my feelings to be romantic. Here there is a “distorting influence of the will and fantasy” (Hacker 1990: 200) upon my ability to truthfully avow my feelings.

Again, this explanation seems valid for a lot of instances of uncertainty in introspection, including (A) and (B). However, such an account leaves open what determines if we are truthful or not, i.e. being truthful seems to be an irreducible notion. If that were everything there is to say, we would run into similar questions as before with the idea of resolution: What exactly are we doing when we are untruthful? How can we make sense of the *effort* which goes into being clear about one's own feelings and emotions? Is it true that this has nothing to do with a “defect of the intellect”?

In a case where I am self-deceived about (A), it seems rather intuitive to suppose that my avowal can be untruthful *because* I neglect the crucial evidence, namely my emotional reactions upon encounters with you. Of course, I can fail to realise this because of my will. But, upon notification I might *come to know* that I am in love. The thing which might convince me is reflecting upon my behaviour, namely if it is of the kind, which we would ordinarily call “being in love”. This corresponds to an observation because—as the example shows—it is possible to ignore it.

Again, this is intimately connected to Wittgenstein's thoughts about how expressive behaviour achieves meaning by falling under certain rules of language (e.g. RRP 1980a: 115; RPP 1980b: 324; Rust 1996: 189f.). I can come to know that I am in love by looking at my behaviour in the presence of this person – e.g. nervousness, ‘butterflies in one's stomach’, obsessive thoughts, etc. – the same way I can realize that I am a competitive person by remembering my past actions – e.g. my behaviour in school, comparing myself to my friends, etc.. On this account, *one way* in which I can be self-deceived is by failing to correctly categorize my own behaviour: I believe I am behaving in a certain way, say, disinterested, while in fact a neutral look at my behaviour would reveal that I am obviously very

interested. The example of love is particularly compelling: it is common (and in fact the topic of various novels) to overlook one's own behavioural reactions which express love (cf. Nussbaum 1990: 274ff; McNally 2016).

Once we realise that we *can* see self-deception this way, it becomes much easier to account for the intellectual effort that goes into our attempts at trying to avoid it. Being truthful with oneself *can* mean to get a clearer view of one's behaviour and to understand how it should be classified. This can be hard because sometimes we have a distorted view on our actions (e.g. not noticing how nervous one gets, downplaying one's emotional reactions, etc.). Remembering one's past reactions and paying attention to them in a neutral way requires substantial intellectual effort and shows the same possibilities of success and failure as observations in the proper sense. Instead of explaining uncertainty as self-deception through a basic notion of untruthfulness, this account allows for a richer picture without restricting the intellectual involvement in the process of avoiding self-deception.

This line of thinking is open to at least four objections: First, it may be claimed that such an account represents an overly intellectual approach to the subject of love and self-deception. After all, loving someone is clearly not a matter of showing the correct behaviour and noticing it (cf. Nussbaum 1990: 261ff.). However, I am not advocating for a behaviourist theory of love which would advance claims as to what love *is*. What I am advocating for is that *if* one is uncertain, one can come to know one's emotions by looking at one's own past and potential behaviour (cf. McNally 2016: 734f.).

Glock mentions a similar procedure with the example of grief (Glock 1995: 247): Someone can point out to me that I am grieving, by drawing my attention to my reactions, e.g. being sad in response to certain memories. Crucially, this should not be understood as coming to correctly perceive a mental object, e.g. the emotion of grief. Rather, it should be conceived as noticing the *way* in which I do things (cf. PI 2009: 332; RRP 1980b: 148). This does not mean that these behavioural reactions *are* grief, i.e. that grief is reducible to them.⁸ But these reactions express grief and I may fail to notice *that* (cf. Z 1967: 494).

This leads to a second objection. In the example of grief, I might fail to realize that I am experiencing grief and still be grieving. But, when I *do* realize that I am experiencing grief, I am always right. Therefore, observation is a *sufficient* but *not a necessary* condition for the existence of its object, which is why Glock calls this an observation in the "improper" sense (Glock 1995: 247). A sincere avowal of (A) implies that (A) is true, hence it violates condition (C2). How then, can it be claimed that (A) is related to observations in the proper sense?

It is certainly correct that in a situation where I "clearly" or "strongly" feel in love, uncertainty is excluded. However, on certain occasions this is not as clear. In some circumstances, I do not

⁸ To claim so, would mean to fall into one of the traps of behaviourism (cf. Hacker 1990: 127ff.).

unambiguously feel grief or love. Being uncertain if an avowal such as (A) is sincere implies that it is such a situation we are talking about. It is in these contexts, I argue, that avowals can involve proper observations and substantial intellectual involvement. Often emotions are “epistemically immediate” (Child 2011: 167) and to speak of an observation would be misguided. In cases of uncertainty, however, it may be that only through an observation of my own behaviour, I can come to know what emotion I am experiencing.

Third, the concern could be raised that behavioural evidence can never bring a subject to know her emotions, because knowing one’s emotions in the full sense of the word presupposes consciously endorsing them (Nussbaum 1990: 279; Moran 2001). In the present case, this is correct to the extent that if one *is* in love, then endorsing one’s love results in a different way of love (namely endorsed love) than denying one’s love (repressed love). On a detailed level of description the object of the avowal changes when I come to notice (“observe”) it. This represents a violation of (C3a) and distinguishes cases such as (A) from observations in the proper sense.

Nonetheless, irrespective of whether the love is repressed or accepted it seems to be true that the subject can *be* in love. Different from beliefs or judgement-sensitive intentions, love seems to be a mental state which we feel subjected to in the sense that our endorsement does not make a difference as to whether or not one actually *is* in love (cf. Nussbaum 1990: 266). Also, when confronted with behavioural evidence (imagine a conversation with a friend) one can feel *forced* by the evidence to accept the fact that one is in love, whereby resisting this force may lead to self-deception.⁹ In this sense, being in love may show the required independence as to qualify as an object of an observation in the proper sense, although more detailed descriptions of love may fail to do so.

Clearly, a love which is always repressed is, in some sense, not a full realization of love. Similarly, a person who would be in a constant state of uncertainty about all her emotions or intentions and could only come to know them by observation of her behaviour would perhaps show issues of mental health (cf. Moran 2001). Still, just because one is not normally uncertain does not imply that instances of uncertainty are not of philosophical interest or do not show distinct properties. Accurately describing such situations of uncertainty, I argue, requires allowing for observation in the proper sense and substantial intellectual involvement.

Fourth, it could be argued on exegetical grounds that the reference to public criteria in the case of uncertainty about complex emotions such as love would have been rejected by Wittgenstein. Indeed, McNally (2016) interprets certain passages (RPP 1980b: 357f.) as speaking in favour of this objection. In line with readings which find Wittgenstein to argue for a constitutive uncertainty in the criteria of complex mental phenomena (Glock 1996; Sorgiovanni forth.), this view implies that it is misguided to

⁹ This leads to the interesting idea that sometimes, we may feel forced to accept a fact about ourselves, even though we *think* (rightly or wrongly) that we enjoy authority over this fact, e.g. love, sexual orientation, descriptions of one’s life, etc. (cf. Hacking 1995; Hampe 2018, p. 228).

turn to criteria for an answer to the question “Do I feel love or just friendly attraction?” because those criteria themselves are too uncertain to provide a satisfactory answer.

While it is certainly important to notice the differences between criteria for simple emotions, such as anger, and complex ones, such as feeling a deep love, it does not seem correct to conclude that there are *no* criteria for the latter kind. Criteria for complex emotions may not be clearly defined and subject to substantial disagreement. Nonetheless, this does not rule out their potential role in *uncertainty* in introspection, i.e. one can still fail to notice similarities between one’s own behaviour and the criterial behaviour of a complex emotion, although this criterial behaviour may not be a rigidly defined class. Even more intuitively, one can *come to know* that one is in love, i.e. resolve one’s uncertainty, through a realization that one was showing the criterial behaviour all along, without implying that there needs to be a sharply distinguished category of actions associated with “being in love”. It is the latter view, I hoped to establish as a promising way of understanding uncertainty in introspection .

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to carve out a conception of uncertainty in introspection after Wittgenstein which does justice to the fact that often this phenomenon seems to involve more than the basic notions of resolution or truthfulness. Importantly, I have not tried to assimilate self-knowledge about one’s intentions or emotions to an observational or perceptual framework. Rather, I have argued that making sense of uncertainty in introspection calls for a substantial role of the intellect, i.e. it must account for one’s struggle to arrive at a decision and the efforts which go into being clear about one’s own emotions. I argue that one way of how indecision and self-deception are able to incorporate the intellect’s substantial role is to allow that being uncertain about one’s own mental states *can* at times mean being unsure of whether one’s actual or potential behaviour corresponds to the rules governing the application of the term in question. In a case such as (B), I can be uncertain because I fail to correctly understand what kind of person I am, i.e. I fail to clearly see my past behaviour as evidence, and thus I may be lacking important reasons to decide. Moreover, certain instances of self-deception, e.g. uncertainty about (A), can be rooted in a neglect of one’s own behavioural reactions. Without denying the importance of rational endorsement or practical deliberation, this furthers the idea that there are multiple epistemically distinct ways of achieving self-knowledge (Lawlor 2009: 48 fn. 2; Cassam 2014: 121, 144). Exhaustively fleshing out and contextualizing these ideas in the context of self-knowledge has to be left for the future, however. What I have been concerned with here, was trying to show that Wittgenstein’s thought *does* leave room for thinking about uncertainty in introspection in fruitful and promising ways – more so than some of his interpreters seem to suggest.

7. Literature

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