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# DAVIDSON BETWEEN WITTGENSTEIN AND TARSKI

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The intellectual movement called "analytic philosophy" has teetered back and forth between philosophy as therapy and philosophy as system-building. There has been a certain amount of tension between the analytic philosophers who are interested simply in getting rid of pseudo-problems and those who want to give systematic explanations of the pseudo-ness of these problems in the form of analyses of the concepts used in their formulation. Donald Davidson's work spans this gap. Different parts of his work appeal to therapeutically inclined pragmatists like myself and to systematizing conceptual analysts.

Much of Davidson's work follows up on that of such systematizers such as Frege, Carnap and Tarski. The so-called "Davidsonian program", in which extensionalism is salient, belongs to this side of the analytic tradition. When in 1975 Michael Dummett rejoiced that the disciples of Carnap had expelled those of Austin from the holy places, he was celebrating the fact that Oxford had become a hotbed of Davidsonianism.[1]

[1] See M. Dummett, "Can Analytic Philosophy Be Systematic, and Ought It To Be", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, pp. 437–458.

On the other hand, a lot of the doctrines for which Davidson became famous in the 1980s are more akin to those of the later Wittgenstein than to any views held by Carnap or Tarski. Consider his claims that most of our beliefs must be true, and that there is no distinction between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world. You can grasp his arguments for these claims even if you have no interest whatever in what Dummett called "a systematic theory of meaning —the sort of theory which the later Wittgenstein thought implausible and unnecessary, but of which a Tarskian truth-theory for a natural language is paradigmatic. You can be excited by these arguments even if you are the kind of philosopher who, like me, still can't figure out why symbolic logic is supposed to be an essential propaedeutic to the study of philosophy, and who still quails at the sight of a quantifier.

Philosophers of this sort think they get the point of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but are still unsure whether they get the point of Tarski. They tend to be dubious about two features of Davidson's work. The first is his continuing agreement with Quine that there is no matter of fact about translation —an agreement which seems a hangover of the scienticism and reductionism which permeated logical positivism. The second is Davidson's propensity to connect all his arguments to the project of constructing T-theories for natural languages. We therapists tend to think that we can keep most of the arguments while ignoring the project.

In the first part of this paper, I shall talk about indeterminacy. I shall expound an interpretation of what Davidson says on this topic which has been put forward in an unpublished paper by Bjorn Ramberg, and which I have found very illuminating. In the second half, I shall discuss the question: is there any more reason to think of linguistic behavior as illuminated by a systematic theory of meaning than to think of bicycle-riding behavior as illuminated by a

systematic theory of the relations between moving bicycles and their environment?

## Part I

In 1971 my philosophical views were shaken up, and began to be transformed.[2] That was the year in which Davidson let me see the text of his 1970 Locke Lectures, which included an early draft of his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme". That paper still strikes me as epoch-making. It will, I think, be ranked with "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" as one of the turning-points in the history of analytic philosophy.

In 1972 I published an article called "The World Well Lost"[3] which owed its central argument to Davidson's lectures. In that article, as in much that I have written since, I attempted to synthesize Davidson and Dewey. I pointed out that both philosophers were attacking the Kantian distinction between receptive sense and spontaneous intellect, and doing so for similar reasons. Furthermore, both were suggesting that all the links between mind and world are causal, and none representational. These suggestions, I claimed, dissolved a great many of the problems about the relation of mind or language to the world —problems which had been bequeathed to analytic philosophy by Russell, C.I. Lewis and Carnap. They thereby advanced Wittgenstein's therapeutic project.

[2] The next dozen paragraphs or so of this paper are taken from my "Davidson on the Mental-Physical Distinction", which will appear in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, a volume in the Library of the Living Philosophers. Prof. Lewis Hahn, editor of the Library, has kindly given me permission to publish this fragment of my paper here.

[3] "The World Well Lost", *Journal of Philosophy*, 69, 26 Oct 1972, pp. 649–665 (reprinted in my *Consequences of Pragmatism*, University of Minessota Press, Minneapolis, 1982).

But in 1972 I also published an article criticizing Quine's claim that the indeterminacy of translation was different from the ordinary underdetermination of empirical theories.[4] I argued that Quine had never given a satisfactory sense to the term "fact of the matter", and that the contrast he invoked between the factual and the non-factual seemed to be the same contrast that he had been concerned to blur in the concluding paragraphs of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism".[5]

I had expected Davidson to concur on this point, and I was taken aback when it turned out that he heartily agreed with Quine about the indeterminacy of translation.[6] During the intervening quarter-century, we have continued to disagree over this point. I have persisted in thinking that the anti-dualist line of thought developed in "Two Dogmas", a line of thought which had led Davidson to reject the spontaneity-receptivity and scheme-content distinctions, should also lead him to reject the very idea of a distinction between the presence and absence of what Quine called "a fact of the matter".

Quine's invidious distinction between the "baselessness of intentional idioms" and the better "based" idiom of

[4] "Indeterminacy of Translation and of Truth", *Synthèse*, 23, March 1972, pp. 443–462.

[5] My arguments in that article paralleled, and borrowed from, Hilary Putnam's "The Refutation of Conventionalism". Putnam had said there that Quine seemed to be making "an essentialist maneuver" in arguing for indeterminacy. (See Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 174.)

[6] Davidson had made his agreement with Quine explicit in "Mental Events" (1970). There he says, for example, "The heteronomic character of general statements linking the mental and the physical traces back to the central role of translation in the description of all propositional attitudes, and to the indeterminacy of translation [. . . ]" (Davidson, "Mental Events", in *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 222.)

physical science strikes pragmatists like me as a residue of the unfortunate positivist idea that we can divide culture into the part in which there is an attempt to correspond to reality and the part in which there is not. If you drop the idea that some of our sentences are distinguished by such correspondence, as Davidson has, it seems natural to say, as Dewey and Wittgenstein did, that all our idioms are tools for coping with the world. This means that there can be no philosophical interest in reducing one idiom to another, nor in asking whether and how a non-extensional language might be replaced with an extensional one.[7]

As pragmatists see it, we are equally in touch with reality when we describe a hunk of space-time in atomic, molecular, cellular, physiological, behavioral, intentional, political, or religious terms. Looking for an ontological or epistemological gap between such idioms strikes pragmatists as like looking for such gaps between a small Phillips screwdriver and a large crescent wrench; there are all sorts of similarities and differences, but none of them have on-

[7] At p. 176 in *Inquires into Truth and Interpretation*, Davidson says "It seems to be the case, though the matter is not entirely simple or clear, that a theory of truth that satisfies anything like [Tarski's] Convention T cannot allow an intentional semantics, and this has prompted me to show how an extensional semantics can handle what is special about belief sentences, indirect discourse, and other such sentences."

It is not clear that Davidson is still interested in this latter attempt —the so-called "Davidsonian Program". I do not see an easy way to combine his earlier claim that a learnable language must have a recursive structure, the sort of structure captured by a truth theory for the language, with his more recent view that since "we have discovered [. . . ] no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance", "we may say that linguistic ability is the ability to converge on a passing theory from time to time". ("A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in Ernest LePore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Blackwell, New York and Oxford, 1986, p. 445.) I should be happy to find that Davidson had lost interest in both recursivity and extensionality, but I am not sure whether he has or not.

tological or epistemological import. Quine, however, propounds a physicalist ontology when he explicates his claim that translation is not simply underdetermined, but indeterminate, by saying that two incompatible translations, unlike two physical theories, are "compatible with all the same distributions of states and relations over elementary particles".[8]

What seems puzzling about Davidson's agreement with Quine about indeterminacy is that Davidson has no particular interest in elementary particles, nor does he share Quine's attachment to nerve endings. He thinks it best for translators to go straight from speakers' behavior to distal objects, and straight back again, skipping over neural stimulations. Davidson has displayed no interest in epistemology, nor in a physicalistic ontology, nor, for that matter, in any other kind of ontology.[9] I see this lack of interest in ontological and epistemological questions as another of Davidson's laudable resemblances to Dewey.

Presumably Davidson would grant that Quine had several different motives for advancing his doctrine of the indeterminacy of translation. He might also grant that one or more of those motives (for example, what he once called "an adventitious philosophical puritanism") may have been misguided. But he holds that the doctrine itself is nevertheless sound and important. He is willing to restate it, but not to dismiss it. Davidson thinks that even anti-representationalists, people who believe (as he and I do)

[8] Quine, *Theories and Things*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, p. 23.

[9] In "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics" (1977), Davidson says that his metaphysics is that of events, persons, things, etc. —whatever you have to talk about to state a truth theory for English. But this is not the invidious sort of ontology which Quine has in mind when he says that he does not want there to be more things in his ontology than there are in heaven and earth.

that our links with the world are merely causal, rather than representational,[10] ought to recognize the importance of the difference between intentional and other idioms.

For my part, I am happy to grant that attributions of intentional states are far more holistic than any other attributions we make, but that is as far as I want to go. I cannot see why this holism is supposed to have ontological implications. I think of holism in the ascription of predicates as a matter of degree: some predicates signify, to use Putnam's terminology, "single-criterion concepts", others "multi-criterion concepts", and still others have conditions of correct application so incredibly complex that there seems little point in using the term "criterion" at all. But I do not see why greatly increased complexity of conditions of application of predicates should be a symptom of the absence of a "fact of the matter".

A year or so ago I wrote a paper summarizing my doubts about Davidson's defense of the non-factuality of the intentional, and sent it for comment to Bjorn Ramberg. Ramberg responded with a paper of his own, one which seemed to me to put the matter in a whole new light.[11] Ramberg's paper has caused me to rethink my own criticisms, and to read Davidson differently.

[10] John McDowell says, correctly, that Davidson is "blandly confident" that "empirical content can be intelligibily in the picture even though we carefully stipulate that the world's impacts on our sense have nothing to do with justification". (McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, p. 15.) As McDowell also says, "Rorty singles out for commendation precisely the aspects of Davidson's thinking that I have objected to" (ibid., p. 146). What I commend is the idea that, in McDowell's terminology, the world has no "rational" control over our beliefs, but only causal control.

[11] This paper, "Post-Ontological Philosophy of Mind", a comparison between my views and Davidson's, will appear in *Rorty and his Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom, Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 2000.

Ramberg suggests that the famous Brentanian irreducibility of the intentional is an unfortunate distraction from the inescapability of the normative. Ramberg points out that the mind-body distinction is intertwined with the person-thing distinction, and that Davidson, by combining a theory of action with a theory of truth and meaning, has illuminated the relation between the two distinctions. Ramberg helps bring Davidson's two lines of inquiry together when he says that, for Davidson, an account of truth is automatically an account of agency, and conversely. For Davidson, like Dewey, is trying to break down the distinction between the knowing, theorizing, spectatorial mind and the responsible participant in social practices.

Kant did his best to separate the mind-body distinction from the person-thing distinction by arguing that the former belonged to the understanding (or, as we should say, the descriptive) and the latter belonged to practical reason (or, as we should say, the normative). Yet Kant's own use of the term "rational" (in such contexts as in "Treat all rational beings. . . ") tempts us to coalesce the two distinctions back together again. Davidson follows up this lead. He often uses "rationality", "normativity", "intentionality" and "agency" as if they were roughly co-extensive predicates.

We can, however, hold on to Kant's distinction between the normative concept "person" and the descriptive concept "mind", by making a distinction between two senses of "rationality". The obvious way to do this is identify the descriptive sense of rationality with the possession of beliefs and desires and the normative sense with being "one of us" —with being a member of our community, tied to us by reciprocal responsibilities. Most of the things which are rational in the first sense are also rational in the second, and conversely. But there are occasional exceptions. We may use an intentional vocabulary to get a grip on the

pattern exhibited by a robot's behavior, even while continuing to regard the robot as a thing rather than a person. We regard infants and paralytics as persons rather than things, even though their behavior can be readily predicted in a physiological vocabulary, without the help of an intentional one.[12]

Ramberg suggests that we see the ability to ascribe of rights and responsibilities to each other as a prerequisite for the ability to predict and describe anything else. The key to understanding the relation between minds and bodies is not an understanding of the irreducibility of the intentional to the physical but the understanding of the inescapability of a normative vocabulary. For inability by an organism to use such a vocabulary entails that that organism is not using language at all.

A normative vocabulary is presupposed by any descriptive vocabulary —not because of any inferential relations between sentences in the one vocabulary and those in the other, but pragmatically. We could not deploy the descriptive vocabulary unless we could also deploy the normative one, just as we could not employ a screwdriver if we did not have hands. As Ramberg says "*Describing* anything, if Davidson is right, is an ability we have only because it is possible for others to see us as in general conforming to the norms that the predicates of agency embody" (p. 23). Agency —the ability to offer descriptions rather than just to make noise— only appears once a normative vocabulary is being used. To quote Ramberg again, "the descriptions emerge as descriptions of any sort at all only against a taken-for-granted background of purposive —and

[12] Infants and paralytics are not exactly full-fledged members of our moral community, since they have rights but no responsibilities. But they are certainly persons. We are less certain whether robots and slaves (who have responsibilities but no rights) are persons.

hence normatively describable-behavior on the part of the communicators involved" (p. 24).

Why are we so tempted to run together the concepts of mind and of person, and to run together rationality-as-intentionality and rationality-as-having-responsibilities? Why was this temptation strong enough make Kant slide back into metaphysics —to claim that freedom is possible only if there is a non-spatio-temporal kind of reality? The answer to both questions, I take Ramberg to be saying, is that there is considerable overlap between the beings we talk *about* using the intentional vocabulary and the beings whom we talk *to* using the normative vocabulary. This overlap is far from accidental, but neither is it complete.

It is not accidental because the behavior of language-users is very hard to predict without taking the intentional stance. Language-users are also the beings toward whom we are most likely to feel responsibilities, and from whom we are most likely to demand respect. That is because they can talk back to us, argue with us about what is to be done (including what to call various things). On the other hand, there are three distinct features which, though mostly co-extensive, can vary independently of one another. These are (1) being the sort of creature which cannot be successfully coped with without ascribing beliefs and desires to it, (2) being a language-user, and (3) being a person. The overlap between those three features is, though frequent, not invariant. We cannot use any one as either a necessary or a sufficient condition for any of the others. Philosophers who like to analyze concepts keep trying to provide analyses which will lock the three together more tightly. Yet there is no need for such tightness. It is enough to understand why we so often use them in dealing with the same beings.

We talk both to and about each other. We both criticize each other's performances and describe them. We could not do the one unless we could do the other. There

are many descriptive vocabularies (many "ways of bringing salience to different causal patterns in the world", as Ramberg puts it), just as there are many different communities of language-users. But we must always both pick some such pattern and belong to some such community. We cannot stop prescribing, and *just* describe, because the describing counts *as* describing only if rule-governed, only if conducted by people who talk about each other in the vocabulary of agency.

Reading Ramberg's paper has made me realize that I was missing Davidson's point when I kept asking him the second of the two sets of questions I listed earlier: Why is the intentional not just one more useful descriptive vocabulary? Why is its irreducibility to other such vocabularies such a big deal? Why is the so-called "indeterminacy of translation" something different from the ordinary underdetermination of theory? Why do we need the notion of "a fact (or no fact) of the matter"?

Ramberg is replying, on Davidson's behalf, that there is a vocabulary which is privileged, not by irreducibility, but by inescapability. It is not, however, the descriptive vocabulary of intentionality but the prescriptive vocabulary of normativity. The latter tends be used *to* talk to the same beings as are talked *about* in the former, and you cannot use one if you cannot use the other. But the two are not the same. You can explain the inescapability of the normative without dragging in the notion of "fact of the matter". That notion turns out to be a red herring.

Ramberg is suggesting that I should have read Davidson as telling us something Hegelian rather than something Brentanian: something about *Anerkennung*. Davidson, he says, has understood better than I that recognizing some beings as fellow-obeyers of norms, acknowledging them as members of a community, is as much a requirement for using a language as is the ability to deploy a descriptive

vocabulary. The recognition establishes, so to speak, a community of tool-users. The various descriptive vocabularies this community wields are the tools in its kit. No toolkit, no community —if we did not describe we could make no criticisms to offer of one another's descriptions. But no community, no toolkit —if we did not criticize each other's descriptions, they would not be descriptions. Ramberg makes the latter point as follows:

> The basis of knowledge, any form of knowledge, whether of self, others, or the shared world, is not a community of *minds*, in the sense of mutual knowledge of neighboring belief-systems [. . . ] Rather, it is a *community* of minds, that is, a plurality of creatures engaged in the project of describing their world and interpreting each other's descriptions of it (p. 23).

I can epitomize what Ramberg has done for my understanding of Davidson by saying that he has helped me understand the point of a sentence of Davidson's which I had previously found opaque. Ramberg quotes Davidson as saying

> We depend on our linguistic interpretations with others to yield agreement on the properties of numbers and the sort of structures in nature that allow us to represent those structures in numbers. We cannot in the same way agree on the structure of sentences or thoughts we use to chart the thoughts and meanings of others, for the attempt to reach such agreement simply sends us back to the very process of interpretation on which all agreement depends.

I did not understand the second sentence in this passage until I read it in Ramberg's way. Read that way, it can be paraphrased as saying "Whereas you can, in the course of triangulation, criticize any given claim about anything you talk about, you cannot ask for agreement that others shall

take part in a process of triangulation, for the attempt to reach such an agreement would just be more triangulation". The inescapability of norms is the inescapability, for both describers and agents, of triangulating. This inescapability is hinted at, but not happily expressed by, the Quinean doctrine of indeterminacy of translation.

## Part II

So much for my doubts about whether Davidson should hold on to the doctrine of the indeterminacy of translation, and Ramberg's suggested replacement for that doctrine. I do not know whether Davidson would be willing to accept this replacement, but it seems to me that it fits in nicely with much of what he has said.

I turn now to a second set of doubts I have often had when reading Davidson. As I said at the outset, I often suspect that all the really breath-taking views for which Davidson has become famous can be both defended and understood without reference to, or knowledge of, the project of developing a Tarskian truth-theory for a natural language. I have come to think that these views might better be seen as a supplement to the *Philosophical Investigations* rather than as following through on Tarski.

The Davidson essay most beloved among us Wittgensteinians is "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs". We relish the claim that "there is no learnable common core of consistent behavior, no shared grammar or rules, no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance" (p. 445). But then we start wondering whether there is any point in treating our ability to cope with Mrs. Malaprop as an ability to constantly construct nonce truth-theories for nonce languages. If there is no such interpreting machine, may be there is no need for a truth-theory. Maybe we can brush Tarski aside.

Early in "A Nice Derangement..." Davidson says that the competent interpreter must be thought of as having

> a system for interpreting what he hears or says. You might think of this system as a machine which, when fed an arbitrary utterance [...] produces an interpretation. One model for such a machine is a theory of truth, more or less along the lines of a Tarski truth definition [...] a recursive characterization of the truth conditions of all possible utterances of the speaker [...] (p. 437).

But by the end of the essay the idea of a portable interpreting machine for a language such as English has been replaced with the suggestion that "a person's ability to interpret or speak to another person" consists in "the ability that permits him [the interpreter] to construct a correct, that is, convergent, passing theory for speech transactions with that person" (p. 445). This replacement epitomizes, Davidson says, "how far we have drifted from standard ideas of language mastery".

The explicit target of "A Nice Derangement..." is the idea of a language as a set of shared conventions. The essay argues that "what interpreter and speaker share, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so is not a language governed by rules or conventions known to speaker and interpreter in advance". What they need, Davidson says, is not such rules or conventions but "the ability to converge on passing theories from utterance to utterance" (p. 445).

Wittgensteinians, however, wonder if the target of "A Nice Derangement..." should not rather have been the idea that the ability to act in ways which are capturable in a recursive theory requires one to describe the agent as having such a theory. In the case at hand, they wonder whether the ability to cope with Mrs. Malaprop need be described as the ability to converge with her on any sort

of theory. Is the ability of two bicyclists approaching each other on a narrow road to avoid collision a result of their agreement on a passing theory of passing? Need the competence of those bicyclists consist in having such a theory?

One can imagine Davidson responding that, although one may learn to cope with speakers in the same conditioned-reflex way one learns to ride a bicycle, there is nothing *systematic* about bicycle-riding. In "A Nice Derangement..." the following is labeled "Principle (1)":

> A competent speaker or interpreter is able to interpret utterances, his own or others, *on the basis of* the semantic properties of the parts, or words, in the utterance, and the structure of the utterance. For this to be possible, there must be systematic relations between the meanings of utterances (p. 436).

But we Wittgensteinians are dubious. We are tempted to offer the following parody of Principle (1):

> A competent bicycle-rider is able to cope with a potential infinity of bicycling conditions (pebbles, sand, other bicyclists, pedestrians, etc.) *on the basis of* the physical characteristics of the bicycle, his own body, pebbles, sand, etc. For this to be possible, there must be systematic relations between these properties —the systematic relations which mechanics, physiology, geology, and the rest are devoted to uncovering.

Since nobody suggests that the know-how involved in bicycle-riding is a matter of an ability to wield a theory of the systematic relations between physical characteristics, why should we believe that the know-how involved in coping with the potential infinity of idiolects is a matter of the ability to find a passing recursive theory? Why not treat the work of grammarians and lexicologists (or their ideal counterparts, the devisers of Tarskian truth-definitions which are adequate to predict the linguistic behavior of speakers)

as bearing the same relation to the speaker in the street as the physical scientists bear to the bicycle-rider on the road? So why not amend both Principle (1) and its parody to read "because of" instead of "on the basis of"?

Davidson has said, in a recent paper, that "it may be that sentences are used as they are because of their truth conditions, and they have the truth conditions they do because of how they are used".[13] Compare this with: It may be that bicycle-riders ride as they do because the microstructure of the bicycle, road, etc., is as it is, and that the microstructure is as it is because the bicycle-riders (and all the other macrostructural beings whose behavior is the inductive basis for our grasp of microstructural arrangements) are as they are.

The latter claim, it might be said, runs together the order of being with the order of knowledge. But does not Davidson's claim do the same? To say that sentences have the truth conditions they do because they are used as they are parallels the claim that macrostructural behavers are said to have the microstructure they do because attribution of that microstructure brings out the systematic relations between bits of macrostructural behavior. Analogously, the words are said to have certain semantic properties, and the utterances certain structures, because attribution of these properties and structures brings out systematic relations of which the speakers remain as blissfully unaware as the bicycle-riders of microstructure.

Therapeutically-minded Wittgensteinians who are not sure we need a theory of meaning can agree with Davidson that there is no "simple, direct, non-question-begging way to employ 'uses' to provide a theory of meaning" (TR, p. 6). We can happily agree with him that "it is empty to

[13] "Truth Rehabilitated" (hereafter TR). This paper will appear in *Rorty and his Critics*, cited above.

say meaning is use unless we specify what use we have in mind" (TR, p. 6). But —being therapeutic rather than constructive Wittgensteinians— we do not say that meaning *is* use.

We would no more say this than we would say that systematic microstructural relations *are* macrostructural behavior. There is no simple direct way to employ such behavior to detect microstructure, but there are complex indirect ways —those used by natural scientists. We emphasize a point made by Davidson himself: that a Tarskian truth definition is an empirical theory, designed to find an underlying order behind a lot of confusing uses. The objects discussed in such a theory bear the same relation to those uses as does microstructure to macrostructure.

What, we ask, would a theory of meaning get us? Why should we not just do what Wittgenstein did —distinguish between uses of linguistic expressions as needed? Needed for what? Needed to diagnosis and treat philosophical complaints. Why view philosophers as having a constructive task? Why agree with Dummett that philosophy of language is first philosophy?

Consider this last set of rethorical questions in connection with the topic of truth. Do we need to do what Davidson, in his Dewey Lectures, calls "exhausting the content of the concept of truth"? Why not just say that philosophers will be finished with truth when they have stopped people using "truth" in the ways which Davidson thinks they should stop using it —e.g., as the name of a goal or a value (or of a great power, which will prevail)? Why not just be therapeutic, and forget questions about whether one's analysis of a concept has been exhaustive?

We Wittgensteinians are hesitant to take sides on the question of whether disquotationalism exhausts the content of the concept of truth or whether, as Davidson argues, there is further content to be dug out. Mindful of the max-

im that to have a concept is to know how to use a linguistic expression, we remind ourselves that "true" has many uses. We suspect that it is pointless to ask whether the content of a concept has been exhausted unless we specify which uses of the term signifying the concept are to be admitted into the concept, and which should be excluded. Davidson excludes quite a few (e.g., "She was a true friend", "Truth is great, and will prevail", "The correspondence theory of truth is central to the Western Rationalistic Tradition", "Truth is One").[14]

The only two uses of the term "true" which Davidson finds relevant to "the concept of truth" are the cautionary use ("justified, but maybe not true", "fated always to be believed, but maybe not true") and the use of "true" to name the property preserved in valid inference. Davidson doubts that we can "explain in a philosophically interesting way" (TR, n. 4) why the same word has both uses. But it was the former use which kept truth alive as a philosophical topic —for this was the one which was connected with truth's purported grandeur and power. Before Wittgensteinians can be confident that they need to think about Tarski and truth conditions, they must be told why they should now turn their attention to the latter use.

Granted that "words can be used in many ways without having to change their meaning" (TR, n. 4), what is the relation between all those various uses, the meaning" of "true", and the concept of truth? One can imagine some-

[14] Davidson says that "Truth isn't an object [...] truth is a concept", and that to think otherwise is a category mistake. But this begs the question against those who think no analysis of the concept of truth adequate which fails to take account of the more inspiring and morally encouraging uses of "true". It does so by, for example, putting "Truth is One" out of court as a use which the filler-out of concepts must take into account. One philosopher's category mistake is another philosopher's deep insight. If we could not change categories on our dialectical opponents, where should we philosophers be?

body devoted to what John Searle calls "the Western Rationalistic Tradition" protesting that any account of "the concept of truth" which has room neither for truth as a goal, nor for truth's greatness and ability to prevail, nor for truth as correspondence to reality, cannot be an adequate account. Such a person will see Davidson as ripping off, and flinging away, great bleeding chunks of the concept, keeping only the few choice bits he likes (while scorning those who, like Horwich, keep even fewer). Wittgensteinians, who are dubious about the "concept" concept, and would be happy just to talk about the utility or disutility of various uses of the term for various purposes, have some sympathy with this Searlean protest.

When Davidson talks about the need to save the concept from those who would give "epistemic or pragmatic" theories of truth, he has in mind the contrastive, cautionary, use of "true". When he is saving the concept from Horwich, however, he talks about the Tarskian what-is-preserved-in-valid-inferences use of "true". The only connection between the two uses, apart from the phonetic, seems to be the fact that assertibility is *not* preserved in valid inferences. So both uses of "true" can usefully be distinguished from assertibility. But then so can "true" when used to mean, as it unfortunately often is, "accurately representing the intrinsic nature of reality". Being different from assertibility is easy.

These various Wittgensteinian doubts boil down to something like this: The question is not whether we have exhausted the concept of truth, or gotten truth right. The question is whether we have sorted out the various uses of the word "true", decided which of them are so confusing or misleading as to be discarded, and specified the functions performed by the remaining uses.

If we look at Davidson's work through those spectacles, we can read it as purely therapeutic. It gives us reason

for forgetting about attempts to define truth as correspondence, coherence, what works, or anything else. But it may also give us reason to stop inferring from the premise that to understand a sentence is to understand its truth conditions to the conclusion that those who understand the sentence have somehow internalized a theory about the relations between a vast number of linguistic expressions. We may have reason to doubt that their behavior can be illuminated by such a theory.

To know under what conditions a sentence is true is, one might say, not different from knowing what moves to make when justification for a belief expressed by the sentence is demanded, or deemed to be inadequate. The distinction between truth and justification will remain firm even after one grants that there are not two distinguishable bits of know-how: knowing how to justify a sentence and knowing when it is true. The systematic relations between linguistic expressions which are captured by the recursive character of a Tarskian truth definition are not different from the relations of being-frequently-inferred-from of which the radical interpreter, hoping to construct such a definition, must keep track. To define the property of being preserved in valid inferences of L is automatically to provide a perspicuous guide to the inferences most frequently made by speakers of L.

One can agree with Davidson that "Sentences are understood on condition that one has the concept of objective truth" and that "without a grasp of the concept of truth, not only language, but thought itself, is impossible" (TR). But this says no more than that those who lack the ability to wield expressions like "I believe that p, but maybe 'p' is not true" cannot be said to be using language, or to be thinking. If to wield such expressions as these is sufficient to grasp the concept of objective truth, we Wittgensteinians

can happily agree that a grasp of that concept is required for language and thought.[15] But the question of whether there is more or less to the concept than that ability seems idle.

Davidson has shown why such deflationary locusions as "truth is trivial" or "there is nothing much to be said about truth", or "meaning is just use, and has nothing to do with truth conditions" are confusing and misleading ways of saying that truth is not a value, is not a matter of correspondence to reality, and the like. But one should take care not to create new pseudo-problems in the course of dissolving old ones. It seems to me that Davidson runs the risk of creating such new pseudo-problems, and in particular of resuscitating those which cluster around the scheme-content distinction, when his anti-pragmatist and anti-deflationist polemic leads him to say things like "truth depends on how the world is" (TR, p. 8). For this will encourage those who still think, as Davidson does not, "that there is something important in the realist conception of truth".[16] This risk is increased by such untriangulated remarks as

[15] Wittgensteinians who are also fans of James and Dewey can agree with Davidson that one who wields these expressions knows that there is a difference between truth and success. But they read James and Dewey not so much as people who ignored this difference (though it is true that they often did) but as having said what Davidson was later to say: that since truth swings free of justification, belief, success and everything else save meaning, truth cannot be a goal or a value. They got a lot of abuse for saying that, for it was widely believed that belief in truth as a supreme value is common to all decent human beings. So they might feel themselves entitled to a bit of credit for softening up the audience —making it less resistant to Davidson's casual iconoclasm than it might otherwise have been.

[16] "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 304. Davidson here explains that that conception is "the idea that truth, and therefore reality, are (except of special cases) independent of what anyone believes or can know".

> the sort of assertion that is linked to understanding already incorporates the concept of truth: we are *justified* in asserting a sentence in the required sense only if we believe the sentence we use to make the assertion is true; and what ultimately ties language to the world is that the conditions that typically cause us to hold sentences true *constitute* the truth conditions, and hence the meanings, of our sentences ("The Folly of Trying to Define Truth", p. 275).[17]

Davidson's doctrine of triangulation tells us that what ultimately ties language to the world is not that various hunks of non-linguistic reality are the conditions of the truth of various sentences, but "the triangle that, by relating speaker, interpreter and the world, determines the contents of thought and speech". ("The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 325.) The point of this doctrine is that you cannot get along with just holistic inferential relations between beliefs and statements (as coherence theories try to do) nor with atomic relations of being-caused-by (as realists fixated on perceptual reports try to do). You have to play back and forth between causation and inference in a way which does not permit any of the corners of the triangle to be independent of any of the others.

So much for my somewhat hesitant suggestion about how one might set about re-emphasizing the Wittgensteinian elements in Davidson's work and de-emphasizing the Tarskian elements. I cannot claim to have thought through all the problems one would encounter when thinking about

[17] Note the word "typically" in this sentence. This stretches the point which Davidson originally put as follows: "we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief". ("A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", pp. 317–318.) It is a long way from those plainest cases to the typical case. For perceptual reports make up only a small fraction of our total linguistic behavior.

Davidson this way. But I think that it may be useful to raise the question of what would be lost by such a shift of emphasis.

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