REALISM AND ANTIIREALISM IN DAVIDSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE I*

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Introduction

A recurrent theme in the history of philosophy has been the debate between realism and (to use Dummett's usefully bland term) anti-realism. This is an ancient debate, whose roots in the west are in the pre-Socratics, which was particularily lively among the Scholastics, and which was a central issue in much of nineteenth century philosophy. It has been revived in a remarkably vigorous way, first, in the philosophy of science, and, most recently, in the philosophy of language.

It is the shape of this debate in recent philosophy of language which is my theme in this paper. Although its form is new in many ways, it remains essentially what it has always been — a metaphysical dispute about the relation of truth, as a property of language (or thought), to reality.

The two philosophers whose work has figured most prominently in the current debate are Michael Dummett and Donald Davidson, both of whom are well aware of the metaphysical nature of the issues. Dummett, in spite of his great sympathy for Frege, whom he regards as the preeminent realist, has argued forcibly for a certain kind of anti-realism,

with mathematical intuitionism as the paradigm case.[1] David-son, in spite of the fact that his published work contains (so far as I know) neither the word "realism" nor the word "anti-realism" has generally[2] been thought of as providing a powerful defense of realism.[3]

That Dummett and Davidson should be seen as protagonists in a debate between realism and anti-realism has been argued most persistently by a number of philosophers connected, in one way or another, with Oxford, among whom are John McDowell, Colin McGinn, and Mark Platts. All have argued for realism, taking Dummett as the main opponent, and taking Davidson —especially his use of Tarski's truth theory in developing a theory of meaning— as the main proponent.[4]

There is no question that these philosophers are right about Dummett's anti-realism, and many of the criticisms they make of Dummett are cogent. It is their construal of Davidson that troubles me — their assumption both that Davidson is a real-ist and that his work lends support to a realist philosophy of language. It will be the central contention of this paper that these assumptions are mistaken. I will argue in Part I that Davidson's philosophy of language cannot be used in defense of realism, and I will argue in Part II that Davidson's own point of view is distinctly anti-realist.

In discussing the use made of Davidson in defense of realism, I shall focus on Mark Platts' *Ways of Meaning: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Language*.[5] Platts' extremely well-written book gives a clear exposition of the use Davidson made of Tarski's truth theory in his theory of meaning, and it surveys and contributes to various parts of Davidson's

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[1] See the works listed in the bibliography. Dummett's interpretation of Frege as the preeminent realist has been challenged by Sluga.

[2] The prominent exception is Richard Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

[3] I shall make reference to Davidson's papers by using the abbreviations listed in the bibliography.

[4] The philosophers concerned are represented in two anthologies, largely edited with this theme in mind: *Truth and Meaning*, edited by Evans and McDowell and *Reference, Truth and Reality*, edited by Platts.

[5] Henceforth abbreviated as WM.

program. But above all it argues vigorously and openly that Davidson's philosophy of language lends strong support to realist theories of meaning and truth. For Platts' own commitment to realism is buttressed primarily by an appeal to Davidson's work, to what he elsewhere calls "... the metaphysical content which apparently is built into Davidson's account... of the truth-conditions theory of meaning, a content reasonably labelled *realistic*."[6]

While focussing on Platts' book, I intend my criticism to apply also to other philosophers who make a similar use of Davidson. I am thinking particularily of John McDowell, who has been the main formative influence in this realist philosophy of language. McDowell is both more subtle and more cautious than Platts in his claims on behalf of realism,[7] and some of the criticisms I make of Platts do not apply to him. At the same time I think that McDowell's espousal of realism commits him to more than he admits, so that more of the criticisms of Platts apply to McDowell than may be immediately apparent. In any case, I shall argue that Davidson's anti-realism puts major obstacles in the way of any appropriation of his work in behalf of realism.

As will be clear, my own sympathies are with anti-realism, especially the version I discern in Davidson (which differs significantly from Dummett's). But my concern is not so much to defend that view as to show how it emerges from what I take to be a correct interpretation of Davidson's work. This interpretative work seems to me worth doing, both because of the great difficulty of Davidson's papers and because an anti-realist reading of Davidson yields a contribution to metaphysics even more significant than a realist reading.

[6] *Reference, Truth, and Reality*, p. 1.

[7] For McDowell see "Physicalism and Primitive Denotation: Field on Tarski", "On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name" (both in *Reference, Truth and Reality*), and "Anti-Realism and the Phenomenology of Understanding".

Part I: The Realist Construal of Davidson

My thesis here is two-fold. On the one hand, in spite of interesting novelties in the way Platts develops a realist theory of meaning, in the end neither his theory of meaning nor his theory of truth depart significantly from the main lines of a traditional theory like, say, Chisholm's.[8] On the other hand, Platts' appeal to Davidson's theory of meaning is illegitimate, for Davidson's Tarski-style theory is inconsistent with realist accounts of meaning and truth.

1. Platts does not hesitate to call himself a realist and to endorse characteristic theses of realism.

> There can be no neutral general form of the theory of meaning. The account developed in this book is reasonably labelled *realistic*. It assumes that sentences can be true (or false) independently of our capacity, or incapacity, to recognize them as true or false; it assumes that... we can know the truth-conditions of a particular sentence, even if it is beyond our capacity to recognize whether those truth-conditions obtain or not. The account assumes the independent existence of objects and of natural kinds of objects, whether or not we have yet recognized or identified them, whether or not we even as yet have the capacity so to recognize them. (WM, pp. 5 f.)

This is strong endorsement of a realist theory of meaning, which is the focus of Platts' book; but like all realist theories of meaning, it presupposes a realist theory of truth, a fact of which Platts is very much aware. In this section I shall sketch out the comitments involved in having realist theories of meaning and truth.

While Platts develops his realism in novel ways, he does not depart from the main theses of traditional realism, of which there are four. Three of these are explicit in this passage, the

[8] *Theory of Knowledge*, Second Edition.

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fourth is implicit. The first is that the meaning of a sentence *is* the truth conditions of the sentence. To give the meaning of a sentence is to give the conditions under which it is true or false; one understands a sentence by understanding and only by understanding what those conditions are. The second is that these truth conditions are "recognition-transcendent"; in Platts' words, "We can know the truth conditions of a particular sentence, even if it is beyond our capacity to recognize whether those conditions obtain or not." Any sentence can *be* true or *be* false even if we have no way of determining which.

Some contemporary realists contend that these theses about the meaning of sentences are all that realism amounts to and that anything else is "extravagance".[9] The issue, they contend, is simply whether one can show that a class of sentences (or a language) has recognition-transcendent truth conditions, and the debate often proceeds in these terms alone.

If we simply stick to the *formula* "recognition-transcendent truth conditions", however, we do not have anything which conflicts with positions which are anti-realist by any reasonable standard. For, on the one hand, almost any theory of meaning can be formulated in terms of truth conditions: "truth conditions" has a realist sound about it, but it need not be construed realistically (as, I shall argue, Davidson does not[10]). As Dummett puts it, "Under any theory of meaning whatever — at least, any theory of meaning which admits a distinction like that Frege drew between *sense* and *force* — we can represent the meaning (sense) of a sentence as given by the conditions for it to be true, on some appropriate way of construing 'true'. . ."[11]

[9] Cf. McDowell's "Anti-Realism and the Phenomenology of Understanding", p. 1: "...Realism is the thesis that a theory of meaning for a language can give a central role to the notion of conditions under which sentences are true, conceived as conditions which we are not, in general, capable of putting ourselves in a position to recognize whenever they obtain."
[10] The realist misconstrual of Davidson is partly due, I believe, to his propensity to use realist trems — such as "truth conditions" and "correspondence" — in stating his theory.
[11] *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. xxii.

On the other hand, "recognition-trascendence" can also be construed blandly. Any theory of meaning will, of course, have to recognize meaningful sentences which we are not able to recognize as true or false. The issue is whether they can *be* true or false, even if we cannot recognize them as either. That is not a claim an anti-realist need reject.

Take, for example, a philosopher who argues that a sentence is true or false in virtue of other sentences held true in a linguistic community, surely an anti-realist position. He may, nevertheless, hold that a sentence *is* true or *is* false, even if we have no way of recognizing which. We may not know, for example, whether or how that sentence is related to other sentences held true (ie., to our evidence for it), even though it is related in a determinate way. Or the anti-realist might argue that we need to consider not only sentences held true *now* but sentences that *will* be held true, in virtue of which a sentence we now hold true *is* true or *is* false, even though we have no way of knowing which.[12]

If a significant issue is to be formulated, therefore, we have to get beyond the formula "recognition-transcendent truth conditions" and consider *why* truth conditions are recognition-transcendent. What is needed is explicit recognition that a realist conception of *truth* is presupposed by a realist theory of meaning and an explicit statement of what that conception is. The realist conception of truth (this gives us the third thesis of realism, implicit in the last sentence of the quotation from Platts) gives an account both of what it *is* for a sentence to be true and of that *in virtue of which* a sentence is true. And it gives an account of both by saying that the truth conditions of sentences consist of extra-linguistic objects or concatenations of objects.[13] A sentence *is* true if and only if the extra-

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[12] Simon Blackburn calls this kind of anti-realism, "quasi-realism': it holds a modified Peircian conception of truth "as a regulative ideal, or a *focus imaginarius* upon which the progress of opinion is sighted." (p. 360.)

[13] I use the term "extra-linguistic *objects*" rather than "extra-linguistic *reality*" to distinguish this account from accounts which ground truth in human interests, goals or intentions. The latter involve (generally) extra-linguistic reality but are not, of course, what the realist has in mind.

linguistic objects which are its truth conditions exist (or obtain) : it is true or false *in virtue of* those extra-linguistic objects.

The latter clause is the crucial one. "In virtue of" is an *explanatory* phrase: the central thesis of realism is that an explanation of why our sentences are true or false (not why we think they are true or false) makes reference to extra-linguistic objects. It is in virtue of these that any sentences are true or false.

If recognition-transcendence is to be construed realistically, therefore, the truth value of sentences must be understood to be recognition-transcendent *because* of the explanatory role played by extra-linguistic objects as truth conditions. Even if one held that every extra-linguistic truth condition were recognizable, one could still be a realist. A linguistic community of omniscient beings, for example, would use no sentences whose truth conditions were recognition-transcendent for that community. But that fact alone would not dictate an anti-realist construal of their language; if their sentences were true or false in virtue of extra-linguistic objects, their language would still be realist. One can argue, of course, that their language is realist because its truth-conditions *could have* been recognition-transcendent (and *would* be if non-omniscient beings used it), but that only reinforces my point: the reason it could have been recognition-transcendent is precisely because what *explains* why sentences have the truth value they do is reference to extra-linguistic objects.

In traditional philosophy, or so it seems to me, the main motivation for introducing terms like "property" (or "attribute", relational or not) or "state of affairs" ("fact", "situation") was precisely to articulate the truth-determining role of (concatenations of) objects. For this reason I do not believe that commitment to properties or states of affairs is an extravagance realists can avoid. Properties and states of affairs need not be conceived of as *objects* over and above particulars: one need not accept Platonic ontology to admit them. To admit properties is simply to admit the role of objects in

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determining what predicates actually apply to them: if "is red" applies to an object *because* it is red, then red is being conceived as a property of an object in virtue of which "is red" applies to that object. To admit states of affairs is simply to admit the role of concatenations of objects in *determining* the truth of sentences: if "snow is white" is true *in virtue of* snow's being white, where "in virtue of" is explanatory and snow's being white is extra-linguistic, then snow's being white is being thought of as a state of affairs. To speak of a concatenation of objects as a state of affairs is not (necessarily) to add an extra entity but just to admit the *explanatory* role of those objects in determining truth.

Properties and states of affairs, therefore, are extravagances only for an anti-realist — for one who rejects the explanatory role of extra-linguistic objects in determining truth. How this all works out, however, bears further discussion, and I shall return to the matter.

The anti-realist denies the realist account of the explanatory role of extra-linguistic objects in determining truth: he denies that sentences are true or false *in virtue of* extra-linguistic objects. From a realist point of view this denial looks like idealism. To reject the assumption, as Platts puts it, of "the independent existence of objects. . .whether or not we have yet recognized or identified them" looks like claiming that the existence and nature of extra-linguistic objects depend on human knowledege or language — looks like a kind of "linguistic idealism".

But the issue can be formulated so as to avoid this. The realist claim about "the independent existence of objects, whether or not we have yet recognized or identified them", amounts to the claim that whether any sentence has a truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects does not depend on whether any sentences are either *true* or *held true* in a linguistic community. For realism, whether any sentences are held true has nothing to do with any sentences being either true or false, since a sentence is true or false in virtue of its extra-linguistic truth conditions. But that a sentence has

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a truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects does not, for realism, depend on any sentence *being* true either, for a sentence is true (or false) if and only if it already has a truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects. The basic realist claim, in other words, is that the truth-relevant relation sentences have to extra-linguistic objects is not dependent on *any* sentence being *true*. ("Reality is prior to truth"). Even if all (or at least most) sentences in a language were false, sentences would still have truth-relevant relations to extra-linguistic objects, precisely because it is in virtue of those relations that most of the sentences, if they are false, *are* false.

It is this which anti-realism (of the kind I discern in Davidson) rejects. Its basic claim is that whether *any* sentence, true or false, has a truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects depends on *many* sentences being true. This entails that it cannot be in virtue of extra-linguistic objects that sentences generally are true or false, for any kind of truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects presupposes that many sentences are (already) *true*. ("Truth is prior to reality".) But although sentences are not true or false *in virtue of* extra-linguistic objects, to *be* true (or false) *is* to have (or lack) the truth-relation to extra-linguistic objects. This entails, therefore, that most sentences in a language must be *true* if *any* are to be *either* true of false.

The anti-realist claim, then, is, on the one hand, that sentences are not true in virtue of extra-linguistic objects; they are true rather in virtue of their role in human practice (for example, in virtue of many other sentences being held true in a linguistic community). On the other hand, it is only because many sentences *are* true that any have a truth relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects. This is not to claim that the existence or nature of extra-linguistic objects depends on any sentences being true or being held true: this by no means follows from the contention that no sentence — whether true or false — has a truth-relevant relation to extra-linguistic objects unless many other sentences *are* true.

To be an anti-realist is not be an idealist about external

objects. Indeed, I would argue that idealism about, say, physical objects is a realist heresy; it is rooted in a view of language which regards it as functioning properly only when it measures up to realist criteria (which, according to idealists, only sense-data language does). Realism and anti-realism are in opposition about the fundamental relation of language to extra-linguistic objects. But to take a realist view on this fundamental issue is not inconsistent with taking an anti-realist (e.g, an idealist) view of certain classes of sentences. And to take an anti-realist view on this fundamental issue is not inconsistent with belief in the independent existence and nature of extra-linguistic objects. Philosophers whose *overall* view is realist may be anti-realist about particular classes of sentences — may be *internal* anti-realists; and philosophers whose *overall* view is anti-realist may be *internal* realists about many (if not all) classes of sentences.

The third thesis of realism — its account of truth — makes explicit what is involved in the realist construal of the first two theses. The fourth thesis is a consequence of the first three, which together claim that a language is linked to reality not because most of its sentences are (already) true but because both sentences and reality are such that sentences are true or false, independently of our knowledge, in virtue of extra-linguistic objects. This linkage is made by identifying the meaning of sentences with their extra-linguistic truth conditions.

Different sentences — whether from the same or from different language — can obviously have the same meaning and hence the same truth conditions. But this implies that there must be something on the side of such sentences themselves which they have in common, in virtue of which they all have the same truth conditions. Moreover, this must not be specific to a language, since sentences from different languages can have the same extra-linguistic truth conditions.

One traditional account of what sentences with the same truth conditions have in common involved the *proposition*. conceived of as a non-linguistic entity, which, having a deter-

minate relation to all sentences with the same truth conditions, accounted for different sentences having the same truth conditions. Sometimes this relation was identity: all sentences with the same truth conditions "expressed" the same proposition, and it was the proposition which was determined as true or false by extra-linguistic objects, sentences being distinguished by whether they expressed a true or false proposition. At other times the relation was more complex: Frege's equivalent was the *thought*, which was the sense of a sentence. All sentences which expressed the same thought had the same truth conditions. But sentences which expressed different thoughts could also have the same truth conditions, provided they were analytically equivalent; such sentences grasped the truth conditions in different ways. Sentences were, nevertheless, related to their truth conditions via a determinate relation to a non-linguistic entity — the thought they expressed. Extra-linguistic objects determined sentences as true or false only via the thoughts expressed by the sentences.

Not all realists (Platts, for example) are committed to an ontology of propositions as non-linguistic entities. But something not so distantly related plays a crucial role in Platts' theory of meaning, namely, propositional attitudes. Platts conceives of these as attitudes not toward sentences but toward *contents*. (WM, p. 61) Although contents must be *specified* by sentences, they are not themselves sentences, but what sentences with the same meaning (or truth conditions) have in common. Hence Platts' view that the ultimate criterion for a sentence correctly giving the truth conditions of an utterance is that one can use the sentence to specify the propositional attitudes expressed by that utterance. (see Part II, 2.)

What is at stake here is the traditional notion of *intentionality*, which is a feature of all traditional realism. What it adds to the other theses of realism in that the relation of language to reality must be mediated by a language-independent capacity of speakers. It is the thesis that it is the intentionality of thought which accounts for the intentionality of language — its being directed to objects, independently of the truth or

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falsity of its sentences. For if a language can have truth-relevant relations to reality independently of the truth of any of its sentences, then there can be no purely linguistic explanation of this virtue of a language. The capacity of a speaker of a language to represent extra-linguistic objects, independently of the truth of sentences in the language, must be accounted for by the relation the language bears to thoughts of the speaker, which are already capable of representing reality (and whose intentionality may, in turn, either be explained by something further or left as an intrinsic feature of thought).

This entails — or is perhaps another way of making the same point — that for a realist the criterion of correct translation of sentences from one language into another is extra-linguistic. For if the meaning of a sentence is its extra-linguistic truth conditions, then a translation of that sentence is correct if and only if the translating sentences have the same extra-linguistic truth conditions. This implies as well the possibility of an untranslatable language: a language will be untranslatable if its sentences have extra-linguistic truth conditions our sentences do not.

2. One might argue that the fundamental novelty in Platts' realism is just the fact that he develops it in the context of philosophy of language, for traditional realism has paid little attention to language.. Chisholm, for example, says hardly anything about the philosophy of language. He defends an explicitly realist theory of truth, but he takes the fundamental bearer of truth and falsity to be the proposition, which he understands as independent of language, and then defines a true sentence as one which express a true proposition.[14] What he wants to say philosophically, he expresses in terms of propositions (except when he is dealing with specifically linguistic difficulties), and this is common procedure among traditional realists.

This is not to say that Chisholm does not have a philosophy

[14] *Theory of Knowledge*, p. 89.

of language: without his *assuming* a realist theory of meaning, his reference to propositions would be incoherent. Chisholm avoids questions in philosophy of language because he assumes that the relation of sentences to the propositions they express is relatively simple. Or, to drop the language of propositions, because he assumes that determining the truth conditions of sentences is relatively straightforward.

This assumption of traditional realism Platts does not share, and it accounts for the novelties in his realist philosophy of language. Anyone who understands a language understands, given the realist account of meaning, the extra-linguistic truth conditions of its sentences. But not always: one of the sources of philosophical difficulty can be uncertainties here. More importantly, however, having the kind of unreflective understanding of a language every speaker shares is quite distinct from giving a theory which accounts for that unreflective understanding. What is wanted is not a psychological explanation, but a theory which articulates the statements we would have to come to know in order to understand or interpret a language we do not now know. An unreflective speaker need not know these statements; it is enough that someone who knows them knows enough to interpret the language.

This is how Platts conceives of a theory of meaning — as a statement of the sufficient conditions for understanding or interpreting a language. "The notion of meaning is ultimately anchored by that of understanding." (WM, p. 6) "The meaning of an expression in a language is what a competent speaker of the language *understands by* that expression." (WM, p. 43). The task is, as McDowell puts it, to "state a theory, knowledge of which would suffice for understanding a language."[15]

The starting point of the theory is the utterances of a speaker. Utterances are instances of linguistic behavior, so what we need is an account of what would enable us to

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[15] "On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name", p. 141. These are not points with which Davidson would disagree.

understand linguistic behavior, by which Platts means an account of how we might come to know that by engaging in some behavior, a person is expressing a certain propositional attitude. What we need, in other words, is an account of how we might interpret someone's linguistic behavior *as* her believing or desiring (etc.) something.

> Suppose a native speaker...emits a string of noises; and suppose further...that we take that native to be performing some intentional linguistic action. What we have to do is to make sense of that action, ... and what that involves is redescribing that action in such a way as to make that action intelligible to ourselves in view of all we know and believe about the speaker. Such a redescription will issue from an overall theory of linguistic behavior.[16]

The *input* of this overall theory will be the speaker's utterance, which we want to understand; the *output* will be the ascription to her of a certain propositional attitude, which will give the content of her utterances.

The ultimate criterion for the correctness of the theory will be whether the propositional attitudes ascribed are *plausible* in the light of all we know about the speaker — whether they are plausible in the light of our overall evidence, which will consist of large stretches of her linguistic behavior and often of her nonlinguistic behavior as well.

There are two parts to this overall theory: the theory of force and the theory of meaning (or sense, ie., meaning in the central sense, for it is in this part of the theory that truth conditions play their role). The theory of force is designed in the first instance to extend the theory of meaning to utterances — questions, commands, etc. — which, taken simply as wholes, are neither true nor false and hence have no truth conditions. What the theory of force does is pair with each sentence utterance an *indicative* sentence, which gives what

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16 "Reference, Truth, and Reality", p. 2.

Platts calls the "strict and literal meaning" of the speaker's utterance. This sentence, the output of the theory of force, has a truth value and is thus amenable to a truth condition account of meaning. To take a simple example, the theory of force would pair with "Is the door closed?" and with "Close the door!" the sentence, "The door is closed."

The theory of force yields this output by the interaction of three components: 1) a speech act component, which identifies the *mode* of the utterance as asserting, commanding, questioning, etc.; 2) a syntactic component, which identifies the grammatical *mood* of the sentence as indicative, imperative, etc. (Mood may differ from mode, because we can, for example, ask a question with a sentence which is grammatically indicative.); and 3) a "monistic transformational component", which yields the sentence which gives the strict and literal meaning of the utterance.

The output of the theory of force — the sentence giving the strict and literal meaning of the utterance — is input for the theory of meaning or sense. Traditional theories of meaning have *begun* with this sentence; Platts goes beyond that by making it the output of a theory of force. Traditional theories have also tended to *end* with this sentence. But to do that is to assume that sentences can be individually meaningful independently of their relation to other sentences in the language. Platts rejects that common realist thesis in favor of at least partial holism: though uncertain about Davidson's claim that, "We can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language" (TM, p. 5) he denies that sentences are meaningful individually. (WM, pp. 50-53) Hence for Platts the sentence which gives the strict and literal meaning of an utterance is only the beginning of a theory of meaning in the central sense, and it is here where Davidson's use of Tarski plays its role.

Before discussing that, it must be noted that this presentation of the overall theory as a linear progression from theory of force to theory of meaning to ascription of propositional

attitudes is oversimple. For one thing, the various components of the theory *interact*: the output of the theory of force, for example, may have to be reconsidered if it leads to a propositional attitude ascription which is not plausible. For another thing, the theory of force not only provides input to the theory of meaning, it *envelops* it. For the theory of force not only pairs indicative sentences with questions or commands (and so on), it also links the theory of meaning with ascriptions of propositional attitudes. "The crucial point to see is that a theory of meaning, of strict and literal sense, will only be part of an overall theory of understanding. It will need suplementation by, and will interact with, . . . a theory of *force*". (WM, p. 59) This is crucial for Platts since the ultimate test of a theory of meaning is that it enables us correctly to discern the contents of the propositional attitude expressed by a speaker's utterance. Sentences which give the meaning of a sentence in a language L are correct, for Platts, if and only if they "combine with an acceptable theory of force and with observed linguistic and non-linguistic behavior to license the ascription of plausible propositional attitudes to speakers of L." (WM, p. 67).

Platts' theory already diverges from Davidson in significant respects. For Davidson plausible ascriptions of propositional attitudes to a speaker are insufficient: when the propositional attitudes are beliefs, it is required that they be, for the most part, *true* (not merely that the speaker have them). Moreover, Davidson requires that we begin with ascriptions of beliefs; Platts, as it were, ends with them. Finally, for Platts propositional attitudes involve contents *specified* by sentences; for Davidson belief is essentially an attitude *toward* sentences, the attitude of holding true. These points will loom large in Part II of this paper. My concern now is Platts' divergence from Davidson within the truth-conditions theory of meaning itself.

3.   The importance of Tarski's theory of truth is its systematic explanation of how parts of sentences which are not

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themselves sentences (singular terms or predicates) play a role in determining the truth value of the sentences in which they occur. Davidson used the theory to show how parts of sentences determine the *meaning* of sentences. Because the development of the theory requires that sentences be related to many other sentences, it rests on a holist conception of meaning, but it is precisely this holism that the theory exploits in accounting for the meaning of individual sentences and words.

I want now to give an intuitive explanation of Tarski's theory of truth.[17] Tarski argues that to understand what it means to say that a sentence is true just "disquote" the sentence.[18] Grammar requires that to say a sentence is true, we have to form a name or description of the sentence, which is easily done by putting quotes around it, thus:

(1) "Snow is white" is true.

To understand what role "true" is playing in that sentence, drop "true" and disquote the sentence, thus:

(2) Snow is white

a result we can express by writing:

(3) "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white.

(3) is an example of Tarski's famous "T-sentences"; it explains the function of "true" by giving the neccessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of (1) (ie., its truth conditions) without using the word "true".

This appears trivial, but it is not; as Platts puts it, (3) is a contingent truth about the English language "both learnable and forgettable." (WM, p. 13) It is not trivial because on the left-hand side (LHS) of (3) we *refer* to an expression

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[17] For a nice exposition of some its more technical side see Chapter I of Platts' book.

[18] Cf. Lecture I of Putnam's *Meaning and the Moral Sciences.*

(Tarski's theory requires that we refer to it by a "structural description", that is, as a mere concatenation of elements) and on the right hand side (RHS) we *use* an expression. In this case both expressions are in English, and the expression *referred* to on the LHS is also the expression *used* on the RHS. But that is a special case and should not obscure the fact that on the LHS we *use* the expression " 'snow is white' " (which is a *name* of a sentence and has 13 characters) to refer to an expression, and on the RHS we *use* the *different* expression "snow is white" (which is not a name but a sentence and has 11 characters) to refer to truth conditions. Given that, it is not trivial that the sentence on the RHS should give the truth conditions for the sentence on the LHS — that is, that (3) should turn out to be true.

(3) is a special case because the whole thing is in English. Tarki's formal theory required that the expresion mentioned on the LHS belong to a different level of language (the object language) from the RHS (the meta-language). A parallel for that in natural language is when we have two different languages:

(4) "La nieve es blanca" is true if and only if snow is white.

(4) does the same thing as (3), but there is not the same appearance of triviality.

If a sentence like (3) gives the truth conditions (a term into which no philosophical theory should be read as yet) for a sentence like (1), then why not give the truth conditions for all sentences in the same simple way: in the case of sentences in one's own language just disquote them, in the case of sentences in another language give a (disquoted) translation —and count the whole set of T-sentences as a definition of "true"? In the first place, there are sentences for which it is not clear how to do this: Putnam suggests trying to eliminate "true" from: "If the premisses in an inference of the form p or q, not-$p/\therefore q$ are both true in L,

the conclusion is true in L"[19] Moreover, it leaves unexplored the question of how the truth conditions of sentences are inter-related. Finally, it does not meet a requirement Tarski considered crucial: that we have a theory which has as *theorems* *every* T-sentence for the language under investigation. This would require a set of axioms from which we could *infer* sentences of the form of (3) sufficient to give the truth conditions of *all* the sentences in a particular language. This is Tarski's "criterion of adequacy", the famous "criterion T".[20]

If language were finite, we could just list all the T-sentences as axioms and meet criterion T (which would be most uninteresting), but we are, in fact, able from a finite base to generate a potentially infinite number of sentences. If every sentence could be generated by truth-functional connectives from some finite list of sentences (as in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*), setting up the theory would be easy (but, again, not very interesting). The interest of Tarski's theory is in languages which contain at least quantificational structure — sentences like:

(5) Someone had a birthday and went to the movies.

Although the truth conditions of (5) are obviously related to the truth conditions of

(6) Someone had a birthday

and

(7) Someone went to the movies

(5) cannot be analyzed simply as a conjunction of (6) and (7), for that leaves out the original idea that the same person did both.

This is the sort of situation which set the problem which

[19] *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, p. 13.
[20] Tarski's "Criterium W" is more often translated as "Convention T", the term used by Davidson; I shall use the more literal "Criterion T".

makes Tarski's contribution interesting. The crux is that in seeing the relation the truth conditions of (5) have to (6) and (7), we must break the sentences down into units smaller than whole sentences, primarily predicates (or *open* sentences: "*x* had a birthday", "*x* went to the movies"), and predicates have no truth value, though they contribute to determining the truth of the sentences in which they occur. How (5), (6) and (7) are related can be seen if we re-write them in elementary logical notation:

(5') ($\exists x$) (*x* had a birthday and *x* went to the movies)
(6') ($\exists x$) (*x* had a birthday)
(7') ($\exists x$) (*x* went to the movies)

How (5') is related to (6') and (7') is known to every student of logic. Tarski's question was, how does the predicate (or open sentence) "*x* had a birthday", which has no truth value, contribute to determining the truth of (5')? What truth-relevant property does the predicate or open sentence "*x* had a birthday" have?

Tarski's answer was that predicates can be *satisfied* by (be true of) objects, a notion which can be defined "disquotationally" similarily to the definition of "true":

(8) "*x* went to the movies" is satisfied by *x* if and only if *x* went to the movies.

Let us call such sentences as (8) "*S*-sentences"; they are no more trivial than *T*-sentences and for exactly the same reason. What they do is give the *satisfaction* conditions for predicates, as *T*-sentences give the *truth* conditions for sentences. One could list some *S*-sentences as axioms, and then derive others. For example, take as primitive

(9) "*x* had a birthday" is satisfied by *x* if and only if *x* had a birthday

and provide a rule to derive from (8) and (9):

(10) "x had a birthday and went to the movies" is satisfied
by x if and only if x had a birthday and x went to
the movies

To handle relational predicates ("x is older than y", for
example), we have to speak of predicates as satisfied not by
objects merely but by *sequences* of objects, which are objects
in a definite order.

The last step in Tarski's theory is to relate satisfaction to
truth, step almost impossible to understand withouth technical-
ities; I shall risk not understanding. Predicates are satisfied
normally by some sequences of objects, very rarely by all
("x is red or not red") or none ("x is red and not red").
(Closed) sentences, for techical reasons, are satisfied either
by all sequences or by none: those which are true are satis-
fied by all, those which are false by none.[21] Thus Tarski's
definition of truth in terms of satisfaction. The effect of the
definition is to show how predicates being satisfied or not
satisfied by (sequences of) objects determines the truth con-
ditions of sentences. The trick is to put all this in axiomatic
form so the T-sentences of *all* sentences in a given language
are theorems of the axioms, thus satisfying criterion T.

Tarski turned this trick for certain formalized languages.
Davidson's idea was to extend it to natural languages, where
the problems are harder. For example, the truth con-
ditions of

(11) Jack was knifed

are obviously a sub-set of the truth conditions of

(12) Jack was knifed in the street at night.

[21] Cf. Davidson, "True to the Facts", p. 758: "Whether or not a particular
function satisfies a sentence depends entirely on what entities it assigns to
the free variables of the sentence. So if a sentence has no free variables —
if it is a closed, or genuine, sentence — then it must be satisfied by every
function or by none. And, as is clear from the details of the recursion, those
closed sentences which are satisfied by all functions are true; those which
are satisfied by none are false."

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Yet the inference from (12) to (11) is not licensed by ordinary logical systems. Davidson's program includes showing how we can formulate T-sentences, which will show how (11) follows from (12), doing this in some systematic way which does not involve just adding *ad hoc* rules.

Davidson's fundamental contribution in this area, however, has been to argue that what Tarski intended as a theory of truth can be construed as a theory of meaning. The simplest way of putting this is to say that what Davidson did was to *identify* the meaning of a sentence with its truth conditions. Given that Tarski gave a systematic account of the truth-conditions of sentences, and given that the meaning of a sentence is its truth conditions, it follows that Tarski's theory can be construed as a systematic account of the meaning (sense) of sentences.

> Tarski's definition of truth works by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give the truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To now the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence — any sentence — to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language. (TM, p. 310)

The difference is that, whereas Tarski offered his theory as an account of truth, Davidson assumed an understanding of truth and used the theory to give an account of meaning. "Our outlook", Davidson writes, "inverts Tarski's: we want to achieve an understanding of meaning or translation by assuming a prior grasp of the concept of truth." (BM, p. 318; Cf. RI, p. 321)

This simple way of putting it ignores complications in the identification of (Tarskian) truth conditions with meaning, and it ignores Davidson's arguments for the identification and his way of handling the complications. But the crux of it is as follows.

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We begin with the Fregean dictum that "Only in the context of a sentence does a word have a meaning", which expresses the idea that the primary unit of meaning is the sentence. The reason for this is that it is only sentences which can play the various roles — communication, for example, — which give language its place in human life.

> It is the notion of truth, as applied to closed sentences, which must be connected with human ends and activities...
> Words have no function save as they play a role in sentences; their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from *their* part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions. (RWR. p. 252f.)

At the same time, we have to recognize two divergent facts about sentences. On the one hand, a sentence does not function in isolation; it can play a role relative to human ends and activities only because it is connected with the roles of many other sentences: understanding and knowing how to use it requires understanding and knowing how to use many other sentences. Davidson expresses this holistic view of meaning, somewhat extremely, as follows:

> ...We can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language. Frege said that only in the context of a sentence does a word have a meaning; in the same vein he might have added that only in the context of the language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning. (TM., p. 308)

On the other hand, the meaning of sentences must be understood in terms of the meanings of words; otherwise we could not explain how we are capable of understanding or producing a (potentially) infinite number of sentences by combinations of the finite supply of words.

A satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words. Unless such an account [can] be supplied for a particular language... there [will] be no explaining the fact that, on mastering a finite vocabulary and a finitely stated set of rules, we are prepared to produce and to understand any of a potential infinitude of sentences. (TM, p. 304)

But, Davidson argues, a Tarski-based theory of meaning can meet precisely the two divergent demands that a sentence be understood relative to its place in the whole language *and* that it be understood in terms of the structural combination of the words that make it up. For, on the one hand, Tarski shows how the truth conditions of sentences are structurally inter-related and, moreover, sets himself the task of showing this for *all* the sentences in the language, by requiring that the theory imply *all* the *T*-sentences (now understood as meaning-giving sentences). On the other hand, as we have seen, this can be done *only* by breaking sentences up into their structural components, thus enabling us to understand how the parts of sentences contribute to determining their truth conditions, which we now construe as enabling us to understand how the parts of sentences contribute to determining their meaning.

All this conforms to the Fregean dictum, for the meaning of words is explained solely in terms of the contribution they make to the meaning of sentences. But words, nevertheless, acquire a meaning of their own, insofar as their contribution to the meaning of sentences is *constant* — insofar as they have a determinate structural role to play. "The work of the theory", writes Davidson, "is in relating the known truth conditions of each sentence to those aspects ("words") of sentences that recur in other sentences, and can be assigned *identical* roles in other sentences." (TM, p. 311; emphasis mine.) Having been assigned identical roles, words acquire a meaning of their own, and we can on that basis alone, deter-

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mine the meanings of sentences in which they occur. We can "give the truth conditions of each sentence... on the basis of its composition. The theory may thus be said to explain the conditions of truth of an utterance on the basis of the roles of the words in the sentence". (MTM, p. 246) But what makes all this possible is, again, the fact that the meanings of sentences are related to the meanings of all other sentences, so that it is precisely understanding meaning holistically which enables us to understand the individual meaning of words.

4. So much for an exposition of Tarski's theory of truth and the way Davidson turned it to a theory of meaning; let us return to the question of its philosophical import. Tarski's theory as such seems to me, for the most part, philosophically non-comittal. Davidson's use of it is not: he puts it to the service of anti-realism. Platts sees it differently, regarding the work of both Tarski and Davidson as implying realism. We must consider how Platts uses Davidson' theory to give a realistic account of the second part of his overall theory — the theory of meaning as sense. This part of the theory invokes truth conditions, and the crux of Platts' realism is to construe truth conditions realistically.

He does this by *assuming* that the truth conditions formulated by the RHS of Tarski's *T*-sentences are the truth conditions of a realistic theory of truth. That is, he assumes that the expressions used on the RHS of the *T*-sentences designate extra-linguistic objects in virtue of which our sentences are true or false, that is, which explain why they are true or false.

This passage, at the beginning of his book, sets out the assumption which governs the rest of his realism.

What makes it the case that 'Grass is green' is true?...
affairs specified by the RHS of the appropriate R-sentence[22]

[22] Platts uses 'R-sentence" rather than "*T*-sentence" here because he is discussing the redundancy theory of truth; he does not think of that as a

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that is, grass's being green. And that is a matter settled, not by language, but by the world, by an extra-linguistic reality. On the realist view R-sentences, while they may also be guides to the avoidance of truth talk, are guides as to what makes a sentence true. (WM, p. 12; cf. also pp. 13, 34, 36)

We have here an explicit reference to states of affairs, a concept which (I have argued) must figure in a realist account of truth, even if other *words* are used.

Given this assumption that T-sentences give truth conditions in the *realist* sense, the rest of the Tarski-Davidson account — the development of a theory meeting criterion T — is used by Platts as follows. The holistic part is taken to analyze the logical relations realistic truth conditions of sentences have to each other. The more interesting analytic part — where we discern the constant contribution words make to sentences — enables us to discern the predicate structure of sentences and thereby to discern the properties (and relations) which are constituents of states of affairs. What is important about this is that properties justify the application of predicates, in the sense of *explaining why* a predicate is satisfied by an object (if it is), in the same way states of affairs explain why a sentence is true (if it is true).

That Platts is committed to this comes out in his discussion of S-sentences. His own example is

(13) Something satisfies "is red" if and only if it is red

which records "a contingent, learnable forgettable fact about the English language." (WM, p. 225) The question is, why is (13) such a fact? Why is it learnable and forgettable? Platts' realist answer is that (13) gives the satisfaction conditions for a predicate: it *explains why* a predicate is satisfied by a given object (if it is). But the usual term for what functions in an explanation of this kind is "property": (13) is true because "is red" designates the property of being

different theory, however, but only as the first part of Tarski's theory, namely, the disquotation part.

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red. If we forgot the truth of (13), we would have forgotten what property "is red" designates. Just as a T-sentence explains why a sentence is true or false — to forget the truth of a T-sentence is to forget what realistic truth conditions determine the truth or falsity of the expression quoted on the LHS. — so an S-sentence explains why a predicate is satisfied by an object (if it is) — explains what property determines the applicability of the predicate.

Platts doesn't quite endorse this in so many words but he comes very close:

> Knowledge of (S) can be attributed to a speaker if linguistic actions of his are redescribable... as actions which are about the 'redness' of things *in virtue of* the occurence in his utterance... of the expression 'is red'. That is how he demonstrates his competence in the usage of 'is red'; which is what it is for him to *understand* 'is red'. (WM, p. 226) A speaker manifests his understanding of a... predicate by producing utterances which our theory of sense, in conjunction with the theory of force, plausibly redescribes as ascribing the property in virtue of the occurence in that utterance of that... predicate. (WM, p. 231; cf. also p. 240)

If this is a fair statement of Platts' commitments, as I think it is, then he is committed to at least most of the apparatus of traditional realism, including properties and states of affairs, and Davidson's theory functions only to give the traditional theory a more sophisticated expression. Before considering Davidson's rejection of this, let me deal with a couple of objections to this interpretation of Platts, not as a realist (for he is explicit about that), but as committed to the main lines of traditional realism.

The first has to do with my claim that Platts is committed to properties because he treats S-sentences as giving an *explanation* why a predicate is satisfied by a class of objects. Immediately following the passage quoted above, in which

Platts speaks of how a person "demonstrates his competence in the *usage* of 'is red'," he writes:

> The mystery now is that there seems to be no *explanation* of that competence. S-sentences are silent upon the (supposedly) crucial question of *how* a symbol *latches on to* the world. An austere axiom [I'll explain this shortly] for a proper name gives no explanation of *how* that name *connects* with the object it names; an austere axiom for a predicate (of the form S-) gives no explanation of *how* that predicate *connects* with the class of individuals satisfying it. Such axioms are silent upon this because they give us no *route* from symbol to extra-linguistic counterpart; they simply *pair* them. (WM, p. 226)

On first reading, this passage appears simply to *deny* that there is an explanation of why a predicate is satisfied by a class of objects. However, the context makes clear that Platts is here discussing, not the question of what explains the application of a predicate in the sense of determining its correct application, but the (different) question of how we *justify* (if we can) a belief that we have in fact applied it correctly. It is the difference between knowing that "is red" designates the property of being red, and knowing how to pick out red objects from ones that are, say, reddish-orange.

By an "austere axiom" Platts means one like the S-sentences we have been giving, where the RHS uses the *same* expression referred to on the LHS, so there is no analysis of the satisfaction conditions of the predicate. What he is doing here is defending the non-triviality of such S-sentences against certain objections.[23] Platts argues that the presence of austere axioms in a theory of meaning is a sign that a language is realist: "Our language is essentially realistic... The theoretical embodiment of part of that realism is the austere, non-decompositional analysis of many of its expres-

[23] The objections are primarily Dummett's. Cf. Colin McGinn, "Truth and Use" in *Reference, Truth, and Reality.*

sions". (WM, p. 224 cf.) What this means is that, for a predicate for which only an *austere* S-sentence can be formulated, the *only* explanation why that predicate is satisfied by a class of objects is that the objects have the property designated by that predicate. "Is red", for example, is a predicate for which only an austere S-sentence can be given; so the only explanation we can give for its being satisfied by an object is that the object has the property of being red. "Is square" is not such a predicate; we can explain its application in terms of "is rectangular" and "has equal sides" (though these predicates will in turn eventually require austere S-sentences).

What Platts is talking about in the passage quoted is the *epistemological* problem of how we account for our ability to apply correctly a predicate like "is red" to a particular object, and he rightly argues that it is no part of a theory of meaning to solve that problem. But to rule out that kind of explanation from a theory of meaning is not to rule out the realistic explanation why a predicate applies to a class of objects (whether or not we are able to make the application in a particular case), the explanation, namely, that it has the property designed by the predicate.

The second objection to my interpretation of Platts has to do with Davidson's use of Tarski's truth theory. The objection can be put in two ways. The first is to note that the theory makes no mention of the concepts that figure in traditional realist accounts of truth: "Propositions, statements, states of affairs ... figure not at all", writes Platts. (WM, p. 35) But this appears to contradict my claim that Platts requires the concept of a state of affairs, for he assumes that T-sentences give realistic truth-conditions for a sentence— explain why a sentence is true or false—and that requires, as I argued in section 1, that the RHS specify a state of affairs.

My answer to this form of the objection is simply that it does not follow from the fact that the *words* "state of affairs" do not appear in the account of truth, that the *concept* does not figure in it. As long as Platts is committed to the thesis

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that *T*-sentences *explain* — by reference to extra-linguistic reality — why a sentence is true, he is committed to states of affairs, whatever *words* are used.

The other form of the objection is that there is an inconsistency in accepting the Tarski-Davidson account and accepting the realist thesis about the explanatory character of *T*-sentences—that a *T*-sentece specifies the extra linguistic conditions in virtue of which a sentence is true or false — and since Platts accepts the Tarski-Davidson account (and is not an inconsistent person), I have simply misinterpreted him.

This objection raises the most important issue in understanding the relation of Platts' book to the work of Davidson. I agree that there is an inconsistency in accepting both the Tarski-Davidson account and the realist thesis about the explanatory character of *T*-sentences. There is however, abundant evidence that Platts accepts the latter: it is the assumption on which his self-avowed commitment to realism rests. I think, therefore, that I have interpreted Platts correctly and that he has misconstrued the import of Davidson's use of Tarski.

The inconsistency can be brought out as follows. What *T*-sentences do is pair sentences referred to on the LHS with sentences used on the RHS, the RHS stating the truth conditions for the LHS. But given Tarski's definition of truth in terms of satisfaction, the truth conditions for a sentence (insofar as we are thinking of them as *extra-linguistic*) are simply sequences of objects, with true sentences being satisfied by *all* sequences and false sentences by *none*. However, if true sentences are satisfied by *all* sequences, and if sequences *are* the *extra-linguistic* truth conditions of sentences, then the conditions under which any sentence is true or false are the same as the conditions under which every sentence is true or false. We can therefore, no longer appeal to *T*-sentences to *explain*, in terms of extra-linguistic reality alone, why a particular sentence is true or false, for *every* sentence has the same extra-linguistic truth conditions. It is, then, at best misleading, at worst false, to say, as Platts does, that "it was

grass's being green which made it the case that the English sentence 'grass is green' is true". (WM, p. 13). While the corresponding T-sentence remains a "forgettable fact" about English, it cannot be because we might forget the extra-linguistic truth conditions of "grass is green" since it has the same *extra-linguistic* truth conditions as every other sentence.

This raises deep problems in the way Platts uses the Tarski-Davidson approach in developing his realism, for the central thesis of realism is that sentences are true or false in virtue of extra-linguistic reality. But it might be thought that my objection, based as it is on Davidson's "True to the Facts", overlooks a central point in that paper, namely, the role of the theory of meaning in analyzing the way the meaning (and hence the truth conditions) of a sentence is determined by its parts (names, predicates). Granted that all true sentences have the same extra-linguistic truth conditions — as Davidson puts it, that "true sentences cannot be told apart in point of what they correspond to (the facts, the Great Fact) or are satisfied by (all functions, sequences)" (p. 759) — they differ in the predicates which are their structural constituents. Davidson again:

> Since different assignments of entities to variables satisfy different open sentences and since closed sentences are constructed from open, truth is reached... by different routes for different sentences. All true sentences end up in the same place, but there are different stories about how they got there. (p. 759)

Making use of this, Platts might argue that even if different (closed) sentences do not have different extra-linguistic truth conditions, different predicates (open sentences) have different extra-linguistic satisfaction conditions, which justify our application of a predicate, ie., explain why it is satisfied by a class of objects. Thus we would have an explanation in realist terms why a predicate is or is not satisfied by an object, and since we know how to construct sen-

tences from predicates, we also have an explanation in realist terms why a sentence is or is not true.

This reply will not work, however, for a number of reasons. For one it makes realism possible only for languages which are relatively complex, complex enough to have quantificational structure, for only that kind of complexity requires, as we have seen, sentences. But as Platts himself points out (WM, p. 34), just because a language is more complex is not sufficient to call for a different theory of truth.

Another problem is that given properties, which are required (under whatever name) to *explain* why objects satisfy a predicate, it is hard to see how to avoid states of affairs, which are ontologically on the same level, and which are usually defined as something like the instantiation of a property by an object: there is hardly a step from properties to states of affairs. But if we have states of affairs, we have the sort of explanation for a (closed) sentence being true or false which the Davidson theory rules out.

Finally, this kind of a reply, though based on Davidson's work, is clearly not acceptable to Davidson. For it assumes that S-sentences explain, by reference to extra-linguistic reality (namely, properties), why predicates are satisfied by a class of objects, independently of any explanation of the truth conditions of sentences (since the former is supposed to explain the latter). This assumption Davidson rejects: it implies that words have meaning independently of their contribution to determining the truth of sentences.

Indeed Davidson has explicitly repudiated this approach, which gives a non-linguistic explanation of predicates in terms of their designating properties, and then builds a theory of truth on that.

> If we could give the desired [non-linguistic] analysis...
> of reference, then all would, I suppose, be clear sailing.
> Having explained directly the semantic features of proper
> names and simple predicates, we could go on to explain the

reference of complex singular terms and complex pred-
icates, we could characterize satisfaction, and finally truth.
This picture of how to do semantics is (aside from details)
an old one and a natural one. It is often called the Building-
Block theory. It has often been tried, and it is hopeless...
It is inconceivable that one should be able to explain [re-
ference] without first explaining the role of the word in
sentences; and if this is so, there is no chance of explain-
ing reference directly in non-linguistic terms. (RWR, p.
253)

Moreover, Davidson does not think that either S-sentences or
T-sentences *explain* in anything like the way Platts and
realism think they do. Davidson is not a realist, and Platts
cannot appeal to Davidson's use of Tarski in support of his
realism, for they are inconsistent.

5.   Let me review the way Davidson used Tarski to get a
theory of meaning. Beginning with Frege's idea that the
primary bearer of meaning is the sentence, he identified the
meaning of a sentence with its truth-conditions, thus enabling
him to construe Tarski's T-sentences as giving the meaning of
sentences. He then argued that a theory of meaning should
meet two divergent requirements: 1) that it respect the holis-
tic character of language — the way the meaning of any sen-
tence depends on the meaning of every sentence; 2) that it
explain how the meaning of sentences is determined by the
meanings of the words that make them up. Davidson argued
that a theory of meaning based on Tarski meets both require-
ments. On the one hand, Tarski showed how the truth con-
ditions of sentences are structurally related to the truth
conditions of other sentences in a holistic way by requiring
that a truth theory meet criterion T — that is, that it entail
all the T-sentences (now understood as meaning-giving sen-
tences). On the other hand, this can be done for a complex
language *only* by breaking sentences into their structural parts,
thus explaining how the parts of sentences determine their

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truth conditions — an explanation that can be expressed in
S-sentences, which give the satisfaction conditions for pred-
icates (as *T*-sentences give the truth conditions for sentences).

So much is common to Davidson and Platts. Where Platts'
realism comes in is in construing both *T*-sentences and *S*-sen-
tences as giving an extra-linguistic explanation why sentences
are true or false (thus introducing states of affairs) and why
predicates are satisfied by classes of objects (thus introducing
properties). This is where he differs fundamentally from
Davidson, who construes neither *T*-sentences nor *S*-sentences
in this way.

We have seen the difficulties Platts' realist construal of *T*-
sentences faces: Tarski's definition of truth as satisfaction
by *all* sequences makes it impossible to take *T*-sentences as
directly giving *realistic* (extra-linguistic) truth conditions of
a sentence. If we understand *T*-sentences as Davidson does,
they *cannot* give an extra-linguistic explanation of why sen-
tences are true or false. Davidson disavows such an explan-
ation when he argues that "the failure of correspondence
theories based on the notion of fact traces back to a common
source: the desire to include in the entity to which a true
sentence corresponds not only the objects the sentence is
"about" (another idea full of trouble) but also whatever it
is the sentence says about them". (TF, p. 759) What "a
sentence says about objects" is presumably the meaning of
the sentence, ie., its truth conditions. In denying that what a
sentence "says about an object" should be included "in the
entity to which a true sentence corresponds", I take it that
Davidson is denying that the truth conditions of a sentence
— that in virtue of which it is true (if it is) — should be
construed as features of the objects to which a true sen-
tence corresponds. But this is to deny that extra-linguistic ob-
jects are that in virtue of which a sentence is true or false.
"The *T*-sentence", writes Davidson, "does fix the truth value
relative to certain conditions, but it does not say the object

language sentence is true *because* the conditions hold". (RI, p. 325)[24]

What role do *T*-sentences play, then, for Davidson? As far as theory of meaning is concerned, the simple ones

(3) "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white

play no role at all, *when considered in isolation* from a theory which satisfies (or aims at satisfying) criterion *T*, for only when criterion *T* comes into play do we get any analysis of the structure of sentences. But without analysis of structure there is no theory of meaning: "The meaning of a sentence is given by assigning the sentence a semantic location in the pattern of sentences that comprise the language." (RWR, p. 257) Even in isolation, (3) remains a "learnable forgettable fact" about English, but while it may be philosophically interesting to a realist, it is not to Davidson.

T-sentences are interesting for Davidson *only* when they show how the meanings of words contribute structurally to determining the meaning of sentences. Moreover, and this is equally important, that is *all* they do, which is not to say their role is neither interesting nor important, but it is to say that they do not give extra-linguistic explanations of why sentences are true or false.

The theory reveals nothing new about the conditions under which an individual sentence is true... The work of the theory is in relating the known truth conditions of each sentence to those aspects ('words') of the sentence that recur in other sentences, and can be assigned identical roles in other sentences. (TM. p. 311)

The theory must show us how we can view each of a potential infinity of sentences as composed from a finite stock of semantically significant atoms (roughly, words) by means of a finite number of applications of a finite number of rules of composition. It must then give the truth con-

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[24] I say more about Davidson's "correspondence theory" of truth in Part II.

ditions of each sentence. . .on the basis of its composition.
The theory may thus be said to explain the conditions of
truth of an utterance of a sentence on the basis of the roles
of the words in the sentence. (MTM, p. 246; cf. also p.
248)

Note the last sentence here: the theory explains the truth con-
ditions of a sentence "on the basis of the roles of the words
in the sentence" — something quite different from offering
an extra-linguistic explanation of why a sentence is true.

The main result of the theory of meaning then is that words
can be "assigned identical roles" in different sentences; this
enables us to determine the meaning of totally new sentences
on the basis of the meanings of individual words. This result
can be expressed in S-sentences, which give the satisfaction
conditions for predicates, for example:

(13) Something satisfies "is red" if and only if it is red.

I have argued that Platts' realist reading of this as giving ex-
tra-linguistic satisfaction conditions for a predicate is not con-
sistent with Davidson's account. But what, then, is the role
of S-sentences (or their equivalent) for Davidson?

Again, the only answer can be in terms of the whole theory
of meaning. (13) is presumably primitive — as Platts puts
it, is "austere". But the reason for that, the *only* reason, is
that taking it as primitive is required for a theory which
meets criterion T. An S-sentence lie (13) is a "learnable and
forgettable fact" for Davidson not because we might forget
what extra-linguistic reality "is red" designates, but because
we might forget the role such predicates play in our lan-
guage. We should not assume, he writes, "that parts of sen-
tences have meaning except in the ontologically neutral sense
of making a systematic contribution to the meaning of sen-
tences in which they occur." (TM, p. 308) "Words have no
function save as they play a role in sentences: their semantic
features are abstracted from the semantic features of senten-

ces... There is no chance of explaining reference directly in non-linguistic terms." (RWR, p. 252f.)

For Davidson, then, S-sentences no more give an extra-linguistic explanation of why predicates are or are not satisfied by objects than T-sentences give an extra-linguistic explanation of why sentences are true or false. T-sentences are illuminating when they explain how the meanings (truth conditions) of sentences are determine by the meaning of their constituents; S-sentences are illuminating when they explain the role of predicates (or singular terms) in determining the truth of sentences. That looks like a small circle, but it is not because in satisfying criterion T the theory gets very complex. Moreover, a point I will discuss in Part II, the theory is subject to empirical test.

Even granting that the theory is not circular, the realist is still uneasy: if neither T-sentences nor S-sentences offer extra-linguistic explanations of truth or satisfaction, what explanation does the theory offer of how language relates to extra-linguistic reality? The answer is that it offers no explanation of that kind at all, for Davidson does not think that language is related to reality in anything like the realist sense. Davidson's theory of meaning is a theory about the structure of language; the relation of language to extra-linguistic reality is not explained *within* that theory. To explain structure of sentences, but the role of discourse in human life, the relation of language to reality is to explain, not the truth above all the role played by the sentences we accept as true.

> Words have no function save as they play a role in sentences; their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from *their* part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions... Within the theory the conditions of truth of a sentence are specified by adverting to postulated structure and semantic concepts like that of satisfaction or reference. But when it comes to interpreting the theory as a whole, it is the notion of

truth... which must be connected with human ends and
activities. (RWR, pp. 252, 254)

This is anti-realist: the ultimate justification of discourse is
not its representation of reality in reality's own terms but its
role in "helping people achieve goals or realize intentions".
Truth, therefore, is not to be separated from the criteria which
govern human ends and activities, which means we can make
no sharp distinction between what is true and what we accept
as true according to our own best lights. Realism's starkly
non-epistemic construal of truth entails the possibility of rad-
ical skepticism — the possibility that most of our beliefs
might be false. If Davidson is an anti-realist, we should ex-
pect him to reject radical skepticism: that has indeed been a
prominent theme in many of his papers. "We can take it as
a given that *most* of our beliefs are correct... We can dis-
miss a priori the chance of massive error" (TT, p. 21) "In
sharing a language... we share a picture of the world that
must, in its large features, be true". (MTM, p. 244)
   The rejection of radical skepticism is connected not so
much with developing the Tarski-based theory of meaning
as with the use of the theory to interpret a language and with
the question of how we can determine whether our interpreta-
tions of speakers are correct. It involves what Davidson calls
a "theory of radical interpretation", which plays a similar
role for Davidson that the theory of force plays for Platts.
I have already noted (in section 2) differences between
Platts and Davidson on this matter, and I will pursue them
in Part II, when I consider the anti-realist commitments im-
plicit in Davidson's account of radical interpretation.

(To be continued)

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En este trabajo se estudia la influencia de la filosofía del lenguaje de Donald Davidson en la disputa realismo *vs.* anti-realismo. En la Parte I, se argumenta que la teoría del significado de Davidson no puede utilizarse en una defensa de la postura realista. En la Parte II (próxima a aparecer en el siguiente número de *Crítica*), se argumenta que la perspectiva del propio Davidson es una perspectiva antirealista.

En la primera parte se discute la manera como Mark Platts utiliza la obra de Davidson para desarrollar una teoría realista del significado y de la verdad (Cfr., *Ways of Meaning: an Introduction to a Philosophy of Language*). Se argumenta que, a pesar de ciertos elementos novedosos en el tratamiento de Platts, éste acepta los lineamientos fundamentales del realismo tradicional que Davidson rechaza.

En la primera sección se intenta esclarecer la distinción entre el realismo y el anti-realismo. El realismo sostiene: 1) que el significado de una oración son sus condiciones de verdad; 2) que estas condiciones de verdad trascienden nuestra capacidad de reconocimiento; 3) que estas condiciones de verdad trascienden nuestra capacidad de reconocimiento *porque* las oraciones son verdaderas o falsas *en virtud de* objetos extra-lingüísticos; 4) que, por tanto, los criterios de corrección de una traducción son extra-lingüísticos. El núcleo de una posición anti-realista lo constituye el rechazo de 3) (y, por tanto, el rechazo de 4) así como de las interpretaciones realistas de 1) y 2)). El anti-realismo sostiene que las oraciones en un lenguaje no guardan ninguna relación relevante para su verdad con los objetos extra-lingüísticos, a no ser que la mayoría de las oraciones de ese lenguaje sean ya *verdaderas* (de ahí que no sean verdaderas *en virtud de* tales objetos).

En la segunda sección se discute la divergencia más importante del realismo tradicional en la obra de Platts: su teoría de la fuerza y su relación con la teoría del significado. En la tercera sección se expone la manera como Davidson empleó la teoría de la verdad de Tarski para desarrollar una teoría del significado. En la cuarta sección se muestra cómo Platts interpretó esta teoría en forma realista, asumiendo para tales efectos que, al hablar de "condiciones de verdad", Davidson se refirió a objetos extra-lingüísticos y, posteriormente, se argumenta que la teoría de Davidson no permite tal interpretación. Finalmente, se argumenta que, para Davidson, el dar las condiciones de verdad de

una oración consiste en mostrar cómo se determina la verdad de una oración, a saber, mediante su relación con otras oraciones así como por sus constituyentes relevantes para su verdad (predicados y términos singulares) y no mediante objetos extra-lingüísticos.

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