

a stronger belief than is justified by the evidence. In self-deception the strength of the evidence will not simply be weak but will strongly suggest that the belief is false. Not only is self-deception stronger than wishful-thinking, but crucially it differs in content, in that self-deception seems limited to the sorts of motivation indicated above (the desire for a better self-image or image of others, or the desire for solace), while the wishes present in wishful thinking will range beyond these. (One may wishfully imagine that the sun is shining. But a belief that it is so when the evidence shows it is raining would be irrational; it might indicate madness; but would it count as self-deception unless there were a powerful motive for the belief?)

Wishful thinking covers a variety of phenomena, related at greater or lesser remove from self-deception. The important features of self-deception are that the belief is irrational and that it has as its motivation particular sorts of desire. As these desires imply, and examples bear out, self-deception involves our engagement with the world in ways which are of central importance to us. Wishful thinking involves the peripheral, which is why it is weaker, why the motivation for false or undersupported belief is less powerful there. Self-deception is concerned with how we see ourselves and others, how we relate to the world and how we cope with our emotions, desires, motives. It is no wonder Sartre rejected a picture of the self-deceiver as pathologically divided; rather, unity is the essence of self-deception, its aim to preserve what is most important to us in our engagement with the world.¹³

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ALEX BURRI AND STEPHAN FURRER

Truth and Knowledge of Other Minds

In a not yet published paper (??), Donald Davidson¹ makes a three-fold distinction between self-knowledge (he calls it "first person knowledge"), knowledge of the external world and knowledge of the minds of others. Although self-knowledge depends causally on the rest of knowledge, it is "logically independent of our beliefs about a world outside," as Davidson puts it, and cannot, therefore, serve as a foundation for these beliefs. The fact that we cannot be generally wrong about the contents of our own minds has led many Cartesian minded philosophers to the erroneous conclusion that the certainty of first person knowledge guarantees its usefulness in justifying external beliefs. The argument Davidson is coming to rests upon some sort of externalism. Externalism, the remaining answer to the skeptic after the failure of cartesian epistemologies, "holds that the contents of a person's propositional attitudes are partly determined by factors outside the mind,"

Davidson says. As "words and thoughts refer to what causes them" a linguist, who is at work on an unknown language, "cannot independently discover what an agent's beliefs are about, and then ask whether they are true." The interpretation cannot get off the ground if the linguist refuses to treat the agent as a speaker of truth, i.e., if he eliminates the so-called principle of charity.

In our opinion, Davidson's three-fold distinction helps to elucidate the role truth plays in acquisition of knowledge, but his own account of "truth mechanics" is bound to fail. We hope to clarify our point as we go along. Our concern is with the relationship between knowledge and truth. If knowledge is identified with justified true belief, then this relationship, one may assume, turns out to be merely terminological, hence uninteresting: knowledge always is true, whereas beliefs can also be false; therefore, the relevant epistemological question is whether a single belief (or a whole body of beliefs)

1. "Epistemology Externalized," forthcoming in *Dialectica* 45 (1991).

deserves to be called "true." This is too simple a consideration, however. It gives an account of the relationship between knowledge of the external world and truth (which is analytical, indeed) but does not grasp the more subtle conceptual interplay when knowledge of other minds comes to the fore.

Let us inquire into an example Davidson presents in "Epistemology Externalized":

suppose we have a speaker and someone else who is trying to understand his words. Each time a mouse appears nearby in good light and with the speaker oriented in the direction of the mouse, etc., the speaker utters what sounds to the interpreter like the same expression: 'ratón'. [...] I think that unless there is a host of evidence against such an interpretation, the competent interpreter will take the speaker to mean by his words, and to believe, that there is a mouse present.

We take this gavagai-like story as a prime example of radical interpretation. What happens in radical interpretation can be split up into five steps: (1) An object (a mouse) or an event (an appearance of a mouse) in the external world stimulates the speaker. (2) The stimulation activates the speaker's dispositions to verbal behaviour and causes him to utter an expression ('ratón'). (3) The object or event and the utterance stimulate the interpreter independently of each other. (4) The interpreter associates the two stimuli with the help of the principle of charity, i.e., he takes the utterance to mean what he holds to be its cause. (5) The interpreter attributes a belief to the speaker according to the reconstructed meaning of the utterance (the speaker's belief that there is a mouse present).² By means of these steps, the interpreter acquires knowledge of another mind. Truth, embedded in the Principle of Charity, makes meaning possible; meaning, in turn, makes knowledge of other minds possible; "what brings truth and knowledge together is meaning."³

Davidson's way from truth via meaning to knowledge is deductive. By being related hierarchically, truth, meaning and knowledge of other minds get an unequal status. Designating truth as the fundamental epistemological notion is a move that avoids the well-known Cartesian problems (due to the priority of self-knowledge)⁴ but leads Davidson into new trouble. The diffi-

2. "[...] once an interpretation has been given for a sentence [...], a belief has been attributed." Donald Davidson, "A Coherence theory of Truth and Knowledge," in Dieter Henrich (ed.), *Kant oder Hegel*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983, p. 432.
3. "A coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 423.
4. Or, more generally, due to the primacy of *evidentia*, as Davidson sets out in "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," in Robert Barrett and Roger Gibson (eds.),

culties arise in step (4). According to Davidson, the interpreter has to impute his own standards of truth to the speaker: finding the speaker right, as required by the principle of charity, means identifying the presumed cause of the utterance with its reference. In our opinion, however, the interpreter is trying to gain a stable system of coherence on the part of the speaker. In radical translation, the interpreter is neither preserving or maximizing truth at any price nor always imposing his own views on the speaker. Rather he arranges the utterances as coherent as possible—coherent with regard to the speaker's other utterances and, no less important, to the interpreter's knowledge of the overall situation in which the radical translation is taking place.

To use a slightly modified example of Davidson's, suppose the first time the interpreter comes into contact with a member of a hitherto isolated primitive tribe, the native sees a skillfully made mechanical mouse and sounds his 'ratón'. If the interpreter knows that the mouse is mechanical, he has to translate 'ratón' (according to Davidson) with 'mechanical mouse', 'artificial mouse' or something like that. But in the view of the fact that the speaker belongs to a primitive community this translation turns out to be very implausible. The interpreter would rather assume that the speaker made a mistake in uttering 'ratón' and that the translation most likely to succeed is 'mouse'. Suppose that, on the other hand, technically highly developed Martians land on Earth. One of them sees a skillfully made mechanical mouse and sounds 'ratón'. In this case the most promising translation is 'mechanical mouse', because of the Martian's advanced stage of development. These examples show that even the first steps in radical translation have to fit some background informations concerning the speaker. Truth, then, is primarily a matter of coherence on the speaker's part, not a communicational label transmitted from the interpreter to the speaker. Moreover, the notion of background informations involves knowledge of the external world. Regarding knowledge, meaning and truth, the latter cannot, therefore, play the fundamental role Davidson has in mind.

It is important to note that we assign another task to the concept of

Perspectives on Quine, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 75–76: "Quine, Putnam and Dummett have committed themselves in much the same terms on the question as to whether truth or evidence should be considered primary in the theory of meaning, and all three have clearly voted for the latter. As will have become obvious, I think this is a mistake. I think it is a mistake because to base meaning on evidence necessarily leads to the difficulties of proximal theories: truth relatively-tied to individuals, and skepticism. Proximal theories, no matter how decked out, are Cartesian in spirit and consequence."

coherence than Davidson does in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge." For Davidson sees coherence as a way (the only one, in fact) of justifying the total set of a person's beliefs, as a way of avoiding skeptical views on the very possibility of knowledge,⁵ while we consider it a criterion of adequacy for interpretation that plays the same role as Davidson's principle of charity.

Language learning resembles radical interpretation. But there are some differences, particularly in the early stages. Here the principle of charity and, because of that, truth do not matter at all. What appears in the role of truth in language learning is similarity. Similarity ties stimulations together, as does truth in step (4). Without innate dispositions to compare and associate stimulations (with respect to similarities) a child couldn't even begin to learn. Davidson would agree with us on these points. In "Epistemology Externalized," he explains language learning as follows:

The learner is rewarded, whether deliberately or not, when the learner makes sounds or otherwise responds in ways the teacher finds appropriate in situations the teacher classes together. The learner is subsequently caused to make similar sounds by situations the learner *instinctively* classes together. [...] success at the first level is achieved to the extent that the learner responds with sounds the teacher finds similar to situations the teacher finds similar. The teacher is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the learner. The learner is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the teacher. All these relations are causal. Thus the essential triangle [the speaker, the interpreter and the external situation] is formed [...].⁶

But if truth is superfluous in language learning it is not clear how truth enters communication. Furthermore, Davidson has to extend his area of fundamental concepts. And extending this area means opening the door to fundamentality for knowledge: what we call similar or what we class together in language learning is not independent of the criteria we regard as important. A lot of linguistically relevant criteria of classification go far beyond perceptible features as color, shape, etc. and cannot, therefore, be innate. That's why the learner cannot *instinctively* class objects together all the way up to high level theoretical terms. The criteria which govern complex classifications in language learning are not innate but based on already acquired knowledge. Old knowledge makes new knowledge and further learning pos-

sible but there is no particular starting point in knowledge acquisition.

Knowledge, truth and meaning are interrelated and equal concepts. On the one hand, Davidson is right to externalize epistemology, hence to refuse the Cartesian approach. On the other hand, he makes the same mistake as Descartes in trying to establish a basic concept. Knowledge, truth and meaning are on a par. There is no foundation of epistemology.⁷

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5. Cf. Ralph Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 193.

6. Italics ours.

7. We would like to thank an anonymous referee for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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