LANGUAGE AND THE METAPHYSICS OF INTERPRETATION : A CRITICAL NOTE ON DAVIDSON'S AGENDA ON REALISM

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Situating the Problem

In no uncertain terms this paper upholds a conception of realism - a conception that does not take side either with the traditional or with any of the recent brands of realism of our time. True, the focus of this paper is on Davidson's conception of realism whose significance cannot be questioned. However, inspite of its appeal, its inadequacy as a theory cannot go unnoticed. Hence, this paper provides a critique of Davidson's conception of realism. But, note, the paper does not end with such a critique. It, on the other hand, ends with a constructive proposal.

Looking back to the history of analytic philosophy, the question on realism has been chiefly viewed in the light of the relationship between language and reality. It is obvious that there is not one way of conceiving this relationship. It is a relationship which admits of different modes of conceptualisation. One thus forms a conception of realism on the basis of how does he conceive this relationship. Accordingly, depending on the nature of the relationship as conceived, the notion of realism differs. This becomes the perennial source of controversy. People differ regarding what should be the nature of the relationship between language and reality and subsequently they differ on what should be the adequate form of realism. In the absence of any agreed view on realism, realism as a theory has been questioned on the ground of its viability. The consequence of it is the development of an opposite trend leading towards antirealism.

In the contemporary scenario, Davidson's conception of realism occupies a distinctive position. It is distinctive because it does not commit the usual fallacies associated with traditional realism. But, at the same time, his theory offers a robust kind of realism - a realism that is universally binding on us. In this respect, Davidson's theory of interpretation is to be specially mentioned since it is designed to keep the universality claim of realism intact. However, strangely enough, his theory of interpretation could not ensure the realism of the kind that he promises to offer. This is how the need for an alternative strategy arises.

The mistake that Davidson made is same as the others. He too tries to situate the problem of realism solely in the context of language/reality relationship. The result is that he could not arrive at an adequate conception of realism. In order to do so we need to take into account another order of relationship. It is a relationship between thought and reality. Language/reality relationship presupposes this order of relationship. As I have argued, there is a need to assume this higher order relationship because how we relate language to reality is largely determined by the cognitive constraints imposed on us by the thought structure. This will be a new conceptual framework for realism. In a framework where language functions through the constraints of thought can offer a conception of realism proper.

In view of the outline sketched above, this paper will have four sections. In the first section, I shall discuss at a general level the relationship between language and reality and how does it influence our views on realism. In the second section, I shall discuss Davidson's theory of interpretation as forming the core of his realism. In the third section, my attempt will be to show the grounds on which his theory of interpretation fails to be adequate and thereby it fails to serve the purpose for which it is designed. In the fourth section, I shall briefly elaborate my constructive proposal where my main concern will be to argue that language functions through the constrains of thoughts and, thereby, we can avoid some of the crucial problems of Davidson's theory of interpretation. This will be reaffirming realism on a new ground.

I

Realism and the Language/Reality Relationship

Analytic Philosophy, barring a few exceptions, does not accept any separate existence of thought over and above language. There is simply no need to accept such a separate existence of thought because there is nothing in language which compels one to go for such a position. Hence to do this will be to accept an unwarranted metaphysics of the past. Michael Dummett,[1] thus, while stating the centrality of language in analytical philosophy speaks of the subordinate role of thought in relation to language. This is evident from the very account of languages offered in analytical philosophy. Dummett mentions the three ways of this dependence of thought on language. They respectively point out, (1) "an account of language does not presuppose an account of thought", (2) "an account of language yields an account of thought" and (3) "there is no other adequate means by which an account of thought can be given".

As the picture shows, analytic philosophy puts language at the centre of the universe. All that matters is language. In this linguistic characterization of philosophy there is a fundamental question, and that is: How is language related to reality? Analytical philosophers belonging to different persuasions have all addressed to this question and have come up with the characteristic solutions of their own. The relationship between language and reality acts as a background conceptualization that gives rise to the formulation of the different views concerning meaning, truth, reference, intentionality and so on. These different views are the outcome of the way we conceive and define the relationship between language and reality. This implies that there are different ways through which one can approach this problem. The approach that one adopts is largely determined by what conceptual perspective he takes while defining his concept of language and the concept of reality. It is this perspectival character of the problem that gives rise to the possibility of conceiving the relationship between language and reality not in one definite way. There are several different ways through which this relationship can be conceived and projected.

Roughly, however, there are two dominant perspectives through which this relationship between language and reality has been conceived. The first is the perspective which defines this relationship at a purely objective level. The second, on the other hand, defines this relationship from the point of view of human subject or speaker. In the former perspective, the relationship between language and reality has been conceived mainly as a matter of correspondence between the two. Language in that sense is a picture or a mirror of reality, the reality that is lying outside and independent of us. In this perspective: How is language hooked on to reality? is, therefore, a singularly important question. To this effect there are different theories which have been proposed to explain the correspondence relation holding between language and reality. The second perspective which views the language/reality relationship from the point of view of the speaker understands the entire relationship in a different way. It is not correspondence or mirroring that defines the relationship. Instead of language mirroring the world it is the speaker who mirrors the world through the use of language. The view that is proposed here is that reality is largely determined by the categories that we impose on the world. These categories are linguistic and it is through these categories that we experience the world.

The discussion on the two perspectives shows how they give rise to two distinct views on the relationship between language and reality. A common error which is noticed here is that philosophers often take these two perspectives as if they are exclusive of each other. This attitude, of course, has its own justification because these two perspectives have been developed in a totally unrelated way. This results into two extreme forms exhibiting two antagonistic ways of looking at reality. Thus, the former relationship culminates into metaphysical realism - a view from nowhere, whereas the latter leads to cultural relativism. Realism and relativism are the two extreme views arising out of our failure to see the distinctive ways in which language is related to reality. There are both subjective and objective sides of this relationship. Both of them are to be seen while assessing this relationship. A failure to do so will inevitably lead to the formulation of extreme views.

There are few notable attempts which recognize the importance of both the subjective and the objective sides while deciding over the nature of the relationship between language and reality. In this respect, the figures that come prominently are the names of Hilary Putnam and Donald Davidson. Both of them adopt a different strategy to achieve their ends. Putnam developed a new framework known as internal realism which seeks to understand the relationship between language and reality in a different way and thus claims to offer a solution to the controversy between realism and relativism. His effort to combine these two perspectives has actually led Putnam to develop this new framework of thinking. Putnam felt the need to do so because he thought that there was no other way to combine these two. Putnam, thus, goes beyond the limits set by the controversy between realism and relativism. In contrast, Davidson uses a different strategy. Without committing himself to any third perspective like internal realism, and at the same time without committing himself either to the traditional conception of realsim or to cultural relativism, Davidson offers a new understanding of the relationship between language and reality. But, note, while doing this, Davidson has been firmly rooted to realism. The one distinct advantage of Davidson's theory is that it does not have the problem which Putnam's internal realism has. To my mind one major source of weakness in internal realism comes from Putnam's inability to resolve in a harmonious way the conflicting standpoints of realism and relativism. His internal realism could not bring unity between the two. As a result, his internal realism has been looked upon as colourless pale realism or a questionable realism. Putnam's acceptance of plurality of conceptual schemes with the idea of correspondence principle attached to it poses a serious epistemological problem which casts doubt on the very legitimacy of his realism.

Davidson's Agenda of Realism

Davidson's claim that an empirically constructed theory of truth provides an adequate theory of meaning for any natural language is probably one of the most significant contributions in the analytic tradition of the philosophy of language. It has a deep and far reaching significance. The most fascinating aspect of it is the form of realism it assumes at the

background.

While working on his proposal of how to construct a viable theory of meaning for a natural language, Davidson defines his conception of realism which consists of two fundamental tenets. The first says that there exists an independent world of things and the second which is an episte-mological corollary to the first says that we know, in common, many of these things. Davidson provides arguments for these two theses which form his defence of realism. His defence of realism relies on the centrality of language. Language is the means through which we know the world. As Davidson claims, our talk can correctly pickout what there is. But this does not suggest that there should be a correspondence between language and the world. True, the core of his realism consists in the relationship between language and the world. But for him the nature of this relationship has to be conceived in a different way. This makes his position on realism unique.

The uniqueness of his realism follows from its nature and the formu-lation of it. Keeping the relationship between language and reality at its centre, the main thrust of Davidson's realism is to offer a characterization of what we must know in order to be able to speak and interpret a language. The reason is as he says "in sharing a language, in whatever sense this is required for communication, we share picture of the world that must, in its large features, be true"[2]. This remark makes it evident that the ultimate basis of Davidson's realism lies on a theory of the world embedded in a language. It is a theory which is claimed to be largely true and it is one which must be used by a competent interpreter. The notion of realism that is emerging must be distinguished both from traditional realism based on correspondence re-lation and the internal realism of Putnam. The traditional idea of correspond-ence does not work because it involves a relationship which is infinitely regressive. Whereas Davidson's response to Putnam's realism will be, as pointed out earlier, that our talk can correctly pickout what there is, and thus, it does not create it. Equally important in this connection is to note that he does not appeal either to intellectual intuition or to any causal mechanism to explain our ability to know what there is.

Traditional realism starts with an explicit assumption that there is a gulf between how things are and how we take them to be. This is the reason why postulating correspondence relation becomes important in order to show that our talk corresponds to something outside. Along with this it is also accepted in traditional realism that there can be radical falsehood of all our beliefs. Davidson rejects the entire standpoint of traditional realism and provides the reformulation of the very term by which realism is traditionally understood. He offers a realism which is not dogmatic but certainly robust. This is evident from the fact that his realism offers refutation of scepticism, idealism and relativism.

In fitness with the above description it may be now asked: What is the strength of Davidson's realism? What makes it so comprehensive and powerful? As said earlier, it is the theory of the world which gives strength to his realism. It can do because it is a theory which must be used by any competent speaker and it must be largely true. This is how the theory of the world becomes significant forming the interpretive competence of man. But this does not suggest that such a theory of the world cannot be contested. One can question both the claims of Davidson's theory of the world and can accordingly ask: Why should Davidson's theory of the world be the theory used by any competent interpreter?, and: Why should it be largely true? In view of these questions what arguments can Davidson give to support his theory of the world? In the next section, I shall discuss this in order to show how his theory of the world defends his theory of realism.

II

Truth Theory and the Theory of the World: Towards a Holistic Semantics

Davidson's entire project on truth theory is based on two fundamental objectives. The first is about constructing a theory of truth for natural languages modelled on Tarski's convention T. The second is about constructing a theory of meaning and interpretation for natural languages modelled on the theory of truth developed at the first stage. These two together constitute Davidson's holistic semantics. As we can evidently see, since the construction of a theory of truth is primary the construction of a

theory of meaning is dependent on it. In this perspective a theory of meaning for a language is essentially a theory of truth. It is now important to see the way in which the theory of truth and the theory of meaning are linked. How does Davidson establish the link?

To begin with, in contrast to Tarski, Davidson constructs a theory of truth which is wider in terms of its scope than the theory offered by Tarski. Tarski's theory is confined only to formal language. In Davidson, on the other hand, we find him extending the scope of Tarski's truth scheme from formal language to natural language. The convention T, so conceived, can be accordingly applied covering all parts of natural language. Davidson claims that there can be T sentences for all sentences of natural language including the sentences containing indexicals. Thus, there can be a T sentence for a sentence, such as,:

<center>"I am tired"</center>

The T sentence of it will be:

(s) 'I am tired' is true spoken by P at time t if and only if P is tired at time t.[3]

This is how T-sentences are adjusted in relation to speaker and time. The formulation of convention T, for Davidson, is a means through which truth conditions of sentences are spelt out. This whole exercise is a semantic exercise because to give truth conditions of a sentence is also to give an account of the meaning of the sentence. The reason is that the two are not different. For a truth theory explaining truth equally implies explaining meaning. The knowledge of truth conditions may be thus appropriately characterized as the knowledge of the semantic conditions of truth. This essentially involves knowing what it is for a sentence to be true which implies understanding the language. Further, there cannot be any understanding of the language without understanding its meaning. This is the way how the knowledge of the truth conditions of the sentence are inseparably related to the notion of meaning. In this context Davidson's claim that his truth theory is empirical is significant. For a truth theory to be empirical means the claims of T sentences must be supported by linguistic evidence.

The second stage that follows from the first involves the construction of a theory of meaning and interpretation. The latter theory is based on the former. Now the question is: Why Davidson felt the need for a theory of interpretation? Why did he construct it? The need for a theory of in-•terpretation arises due to the necessity of explaining how communication is possible between the speaker and the hearer who is called the interpreter by Davidson. A theory of interpretation is thus meant to interpret the language of the other speakers, and to do this Davidson assumes an interpreter and constructs a theory of interpretation centering around him. The interpreter is one who seeks to understand what the other speakers mean when they say something. This is the task of the interpreter and how he does it is the topic which the theory of interpretation seeks to explain. The main objective of Davidson's theory of interpretation is to work out the details of interpretation. This is necessary otherwise we cannot explain how communication is possible.

It has been said earlier that T sentences are constructed in relation to person and time. There are only person-time relativized T sentences. Now interpretation of these sentences will be impossible unless we assume, as Davidson argues, certain conditions or constraints. Thus, when we interpret the utterances of other speakers we necessarily assume a background of network of beliefs commonly shared both by the speaker and the interpreter. Between the two there must be agreement as far as possible. The interpreter must agree with the conditions under which the speaker holds his sentence to be true. In order to attain this agreement it is thus necessary to hold that the speaker and the interpreter have a similar system of belief. In view of this it may be said that the theory of interpretation seeks to understand beliefs of the speaker and the meaning of the words figured in his utterances. It may be mentioned right here that belief and meaning, for Davidson, are not two separate things. They form a nexus to which I shall come later.

In the light of the above general remarks, we can specify the three conditions of interpretation. This will help us to understand in a concrete manner the role and the significance of interpretation in the construction of

a theory of truth empirically. For a theory of truth to be empirical we need to accept that all alien speakers are like us in the following three respects. At first, they are members of roughly determinable speech communities. The second, they speak with similar intentions like ours and the third is that they believe in what we believe. These are the three conditions of interpretations. Let me briefly elaborate the role of these three conditions in order to show their significance.

First: The idea of a speech community. We have seen that the main focus of the theory of truth is the construction of T sentences of the individual speaker. Accordingly, if we think that the interpretation of the   utterances of the single speaker must be based on the speaker's attitude - the attitude of holding the sentences true we may be faced with equally eligible rival interpretations. This will result into unmanageable plurality of conjoint theories of belief and meaning leading to the failure of developing a single theory of interpretation. On the other hand, Davidson's plea is that as to interpret a particular utterance we necessarily require a single theory of interpretation which will be comprehensive enough, so that the theory can interpret infinite number of utterances. What is crucially involved here is the notion of evidence. For a theory to be comprehensive it is to be assumed that the evidence for interpretation does not change. Thus, as Davidson claims, the evidence for the interpretation of a particular sentence will be same for the interpretation of all utterances of a speaker or community at large. In order to do this, Davidson[4] introduces the notion of a speech community which implies speakers belonging to the same language have the same linguistic repertoire. Thus by virtue of this, speakers of the same language mean the same things by their utterances. This will help us to have a coherent interpretation. The notion of a speech community changes the notion of evidence. The earlier ieda of single sentences produced by single speakers on single occasions will be now considered from the point of view of some language L which constitutes the speech community of all speakers.

Second: Similar pattern of intentions. The idea of a speech community suggests sharing of the same linguistic repertoire among its members i.e., speakers. This is the ground level assumption from which the second assump-

tion may be said to follow. Any language using creature while speaking will have the same pattern of intentions that we have, namely intentions to inform, command, request, promise and so on. Through this assumption we take others to be using language in the same way in which we use language. This suggests the acceptance of the fact that alien speakers speak with the purposes with which we speak. This assumption is necessary beacuse unless we accept that all speakers speak with intentions like ours, there cannot be any coherent interpretation. This constitutes the second condition of interpretation.

Third: Possession of a common system of beliefs.

The third condition which assumes that all alien speakers roughly believe what we believe is central to Davidson's theory of interpretation. In fact, the thesis has a wider implication since Davidson is using the idea of a holistic nature of belief for the coherentist justification of knowledge and truth[5].

First of all, we must agree that shareability of belief is a fact rather an unnoticed fact. However, the point is the very fact that we understand each other, communicate with each other and even disagree with each other shows that we share most of our beliefs. In the absence of the shareability of beliefs people will continuously misunderstand one another leading to a situation where communication will be impossible. In the context of dispute, for example, we see only the differences among the two speakers. But we do not see the common ground that is shared by the two speakers. It is this common ground which makes the dispute possible. A dispute presupposes a system of commonly shared beliefs. An important fact about belief is that a belief is never seen in isolation from other beliefs because, it is always supported by a dense pattern of beliefs. It is within this pattern or system the particular belief is identified and described.

The above notion of belief is important while we consider the meaning of a speaker's utterance. The utterance of a speaker is determined by the three conditions. First is, of course, the meaning the speaker assigns to the sentences and the next two are the belief and the intention that the

speaker has in the situation. Interpretation is the function of these three. This nexus shows that one can get the meaning of the speaker's utterance if he knows the second and the third. Davidson holds that the meaning we ascribe to the speaker's utterance is supported by the belief we assign to the speaker. There is a sense of inter-dependence between these two types of ascriptions. Davidson argues that in assigning belief to others we go by the principle of charity. We, as interpreters, take others as having the same belief and desires like our own. It may be equally important to mention that others hold belief in the same consistent manner as we do. If we cannot believe inconsistently so is others who too cannot believe inconsistently. This shows that for interpretation to be possible a parity must be maintained between the interpreter and the interpreted in matters of beliefs.

All this is fine. But the question is about the truth of a belief. Concurrence does not make a belief true. We require to show that not only we share our beliefs but most of our shared beliefs are true. To explain this, Davidson[6] introduces the notion of omniscient interpreter (OI). The force of the argument is simple. In short, it states that an omniscient interpreter is one who being an interpreter shares most of his beliefs with the speaker and being omniscient his beliefs cannot be wrong. They are true. The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that the speaker's beliefs are true since they are concurrent with the beliefs held by OI. This lead Davidson to claim that there must be separate place for OI in the theory of interpretation.

From the claim that most of our beliefs are true, Davidson goes further to show the untenability of scepticism. For a sceptic to doubt the correctness of our belief must satisfy the two following conditions. First, he must share his beliefs with our's and, second, such beliefs must be true. The significance of this apparently ambivalent formulation of sceptic's position can be easily seen. If a sceptic has to meaningfully doubt the correctness of others' belief he has to detect mistake in other's belief. This will be possible only through the interpretation of others beliefs. But for interpretation to be possible the sceptic has to satisfy the earlier stated two conditions. He can interpret only if he shared his beliefs with others and if such

beliefs are true. Scepticism, for Davidson, is thus self defeating.

The veridical nature of belief is not a hypothetical postulation. On the ohter hand, their veridical nature becomes evident once we see how intimately they are related with various behavioural, biological and neurological phenomena as well as various propositional attitudes, sych as, desires and hopes. The relationship between beliefs and these elements is such that the former cannot be interpreted in isolation from the latter. As a result, beliefs assume a complicated structure which can be grasped only when they are expressed through language. This becomes obvious when we see the interdependence of belief and meaning. As Davidson argues it is not only meaning which is dependent on belief but belief is also equally dependent on meaning. To use Davidson's expression, meaning and belief are thus interlocked.

These are the three conditions to be satisfied for successful interpretation. Without this we cannot construct a theory of truth empirically. As we know the construction of such a theory really implies constructing a theory of meaning. I have, so far described the three conditions and its importance in interpretation. But now I would like to raise a critical question and will examine the notion of interpretation in the light of the question.

If constructing a theory of truth empirically implies that we will be able to understand all meaningful speech then it is necessary to show that the three conditions of interpretation are correct. To put the same thing in a different way: There should not be a context where we fail to understand the speech produced by speakers of whom these conditions are not true. That the three conditions of interpretation must be universally binding is a fundamental requirement for the claim that a theory of truth will work as a theory of meaning for any creature using language.

The problem that is posed here is ultimately related to the interpretive competence of man. How far this competence is central to man is a question to be resolved. Davidson claims that it is central to man. It is a claim which is based on the supposition that all human beings are interpret-

ers and as interpreters they are alike. Davidson demonstrates this at two levels[8]. First, this ability to interpret is central to thinking. Since thinking is necessary for speaking, Davidson concludes from this that all speakers are alike. They are alike because they are all interpreters and as interpreters they satisfy the three conditions of interpretation. Second, the ability to interpret is the ground for acquiring knowledge - knowledge of how things are in the world. We come to know the world in communication - by talking to others i.e., interpretation. The same holds true of others. Hence, as interpreters we share many items of knowledge and belief with others. For Davidson, there is nothing called pre-linguistic and pre-interpretive self of man. The very existence of self assumes a common world of thought, speech and knowledge.

These are the two ways through which Davidson gives justification for his claim that the ability to interpret is central to man. This justifies the correctness of the conditions of interpretation. But how far Davidson's picture of an interpretive man is correct? Certainly, the picture that he is offering is appealing. But, I am afraid, he has not given sufficient proof to demonstrate the compelling nature of the picture. He did not take any step to prevent the counter possibilities. I shall now argue that Davidson's two theses, namely, the ability to interpret is necessary for thinking and the ability to interpret is the ground for the acquisition of knowledge and belief provide enough room to raise doubts. Doubts can be raised because we can always think of counter possibility. This means that conditions of interpretation are not universally held and, hence, they are not universally binding.

III

Thinking and Interpretation: The Counter Possibility

As pointed out earlier, the ability to interpret, for Davidson, is central to thinking. Without the former the latter will not be possible. To put it in Davidson's formulation "a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another."[9] Davidson offers following arguments which constitute the validity of his thesis.

First:

For a being to have thought implies that he must have a system of beliefs. The justification for it is that a particular thought is defined only in relation to a system of beliefs within which it has its own place. To give Davidson's example, in order to think whether the gun is loaded "requires the belief that a gun is a weapon, that is a more or less enduring physical object, and so on."[10] These are the beliefs forming a system that "identifies a thought by locating it in a logic and epistemic space."[11]

Second:

For a being to have a system of beliefs implies that it must have the concept of belief which suggests that a belief is essentially capable of being true or false. Unless he has this idea (the possibility of being mistaken) he cannot have a belief. To have this idea "requires grasping the contrast between true and false belief."[12]

Third:

For a being having the concept of belief implies that he must be an interpreter and to be an interpreter means that he must be a member of a speech community. We can see that there is a chain of connections involved here which may be understood in the following terms. To start with, as Davidson[13] argues, belief existing as a private attitude is unintelligible and therefore, it must be checked as against the public norms provided by language. This brings in the notion of a speech community. A creature can have the concept of belief only when he is the member of a speech community. This is necesary because otherwise his beliefs cannot be publicly checked. This is, in other words, to suggest that "we have the idea of belief only from the role of belief in the interpretation of language."

The three arguments provide the basis to Davidson's claim that for a being to have thoughts implies that he is a speech interpreter. The ability to interpret is then the necessary condition for interpretation. But despite Davidson's best effort these arguments could not prevent the possibility that counters Davidson's thesis.

The main thread of Davidson's argument is that beliefs are socially shared and it is only through a common language we come to know those beliefs. Beliefs are not formed in private experiences of the individual nor is there anything called pre-social and pre-linguistic self of the individual. This is essentially a social perspective where one can have thoughts only by interpreting the speech of the other.

Alternative to this is the individualistic perspective which denies the social perspective altogether. Eldridge[14] pointed out that Descartes and Frege, for example, will not agree to this social perspective and thus will not accept interpretation as the basis of thought. From the individualistic perspective, it may be quite pertinently asked: Why do we need to be an interpreter in order to have the concept of belief? Further, it is not true to say that we acquire the concept of belief only by interpreting the speech of others. We can, as well, have this concept from our own individual experiences. Finally, there can be a possibility where a person can have beliefs, but we cannot recognize his beliefs simply because they are not experienced by the person. As a result, we cannot interpret such a creature by constructing a theory of truth. Notice these counter possibilities do not show that Davidson's three arguments are invalid nor do they question Davidson's theory of interpretation. They are more like lacunas- the existence of which show that Davidson's theory of interpretation is not universally binding and, hence, it is not realistic in the robust sense of the term.

Interpretation and Knowledge: The Counter Possibility

I have already said that, according to Davidson, the ability to interpret is the condition for acquiring knowledge of the external world. In this connection the main thrust of his argument is to show that there is a correct theory of the world embodied in all natural languages. As he puts it "our language - any language (must) incorporate or depend upon a largely correct, shared, view of how things are." From this it follows that all interpreters necessarily possess a largely correct theory of the world. Understanding of one another's speech is possible due to this commonly shared view of the world. In view of this unsupported claim Davidson himself raised

two fundamental questions in order to defend his thesis that the ability to interpret is the condition for knowing. The two questions are:

First: Why do we share a view of the world in order to understand the speech of one another?

Reply: Davidson's answer is that as to understand and interpret the speech of the alien speakers it is necessary to assume that they believe roughly what we believe. To say this is not to deny the mutual differences. On the contrary, we can make sense of the differences "only against a background of shared beliefs."[16] If this is not assumed we will not be able to understand the utterances of others. This provides the justification that our ability to interpret one another implies sharing of a common view of the world.

Second: Why sharing a common view of the world implies sharing of many true beliefs?

Reply: It has been argued that successful interpretation involves concurrence of beliefs. But the question is whether what is agreed is true or not? True, agreement cannot guarantee truth. If so, then what is it that decides truth? Davidson thinks that this is essentially a wrong way of posing the problem. The present claim regarding the truth of shared beliefs is connected to the first. Infact, as he says, the first is a basic claim whereas the second is an extended claim. We require the community of beliefs because it provided the basis for communication and understanding. From this the extended claim that follows is, to quote Davidson, "that objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed is true if some of what is agreed is false."[17] Notice that in order to establish the extended claim he is using the same strategy that he used in order to establish the former claim which according to him is the basic claim.

In my earlier discussion since I have talked about the veridical nature of beliefs, I do not want to go into it any more. However, it is important to mention in this connection the coherentist justification that Davidson later offers while establishing his thesis that our shared beliefs are largely true. Davidson's argument shows that the world is what we believe it to be.

To hold this is to imply that our beliefs in some sense must correspond to the world. But this idea of correspondence should not be understood in the sense of mirroring between a belief and the world. The reason is that we cannot directly state the correspondence relation holding between the two. There cannot be any confrontational correspondence since we cannot confront our beliefs to reality. The only way to justify the truth of these beliefs will be the coherentist justification. The very fact of coherence justifies the truth because, to use Davidson's phrase,'coherence yields correspondence.' It is by believing coherently we touch the reality. This itself provides the ground for making knowledge claim. It is a knowledge of the world - the world that is in no sense created by us. Further, to know the world we do not have to go outside the system of our shared beliefs.

The two questions which constitute the two claims of Davidson lead to the conclusion:

> Successful communication proves the existence of a shared,and largely
> true, view of the world.[18]

The alternative way of saying this will be that creatures who can interpret one another must be sharing many true belliefs. This is how the ability to interpret becomes the ground for knowledge.

The thesis that Davidson is offering is certainly impressive and perhaps convincing too. But like the previous issue here also Davidson could not prevent the existence of counter possibilities. These counter possibilities are not remote and thus their existence shows that Davidson's conditions on interpretation are not universally binding. I shall mention below a few instances of counter possibility. Some of them have been already cited by Eldridge.

Let us start with the basic claim of Davidson that all interpreters believe roughly what we believe about the world. This common sharing of beliefs is possible because all creatures who can interpret one another must share a common view of the world. As we can see the whole emphasis lies on the fact that all interpreters are alike because they are interpreters of one another. But can we think of it as universal possibility? Can we think of a

situation where there are creatures who can interpret one another but we cannot interpret them? Eldridge accepts this possibility. We can conceive of a context, such as, pre-modern scientific interpreters of the world who can interpret one another, but we, on the other hand, cannot interpret them. This is reflected in our attitude where we make it clear what is our position as against their position. This instance is a counter possibility to the universal claim that all interpreters believe what we believe about the world.

Coming to the second claim, we find Davidson saying that we as interpreters share many true beliefs. But we can think of a contrary situation. Where there may be creatures whom we cannot interpret and yet they know things as they are. The context where we can conceive of this possibility is the future scientific interpreters of the world.

In order to rule out the possibility that there can be a system of beliefs which is better than ours, Davidson, as Eldridge suggests, must modify his position. The modified position will say that the creatures who have a view of the world are only those whom we can interpret. But as a condition this is unsatisfactory. As Eldridge pointed out, we cannot take this as self evident. Without any proof how could we accept that we can interpret all creatures who have a view of the world? The example of future scientists or the case of Martians will reveal that the claim made by the modified position is not self-evident.

Davidson has a reply to these counter possibilities. To explain these cases he appeals to the principle of charity. As he puts it forcefully: "charity is forced on us: whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters."[19] It is now possible that with the help of the charity principle we can rule out the counter possibilities and can reaffirm that in order to understand the alien speakers we must assume that they believe what we believe. Apparently this is fine. But the problem that we have posed remains the same. Using the charity principle we can assume that all alien speakers believe roughly what we believe. But this does not establish that all alien speakers believe roughly what we believe. As we see, there is a difference between what we believe and what is

actually the case. This gap has to be accounted for and the principle of charity may not be strong enough to explain the gap.

We can now see that Davidson's theory of interpretation is not universally binding. If this is not universally binding then on the same ground his theory of realism is also not universally binding. The reason is his theory of realism is supported by his theory of interpretation. In order to save Davidson's theory of realism we have to save Davidson's theory of interpretation. To do this we must change our orientation - the orientation that is dominated by the social perspective. From social we change to a new perspective which may be roughly described as cognitive perspective. In this perspective what plays the central role is thought and accordingly we adopt a different approach to our problem. The problem concerning how we think and use language will have a new explanation. Language functions through the constraints of thought which may be called cognitive constraints. Accordingly, the relationship between language and reality presupposes a higher order relationship, namely, thought. For a theory of interpretation to be universally binding must be designed in such a way that it should presuppose those constraints. these constraints are the presuppositions of the theory. The better way of putting it will be that they are the necessary presuppositions of a speaker - interpreter situation. Before I discuss this it should be made clear that I am not interested in offering an alternative theory. In view of the counter possibilities there is a serious problem of how to approach Davidson's theory. My attempt may be taken as one of the ways to approach the problem.

IV

The Objective World and the Cognitive Constraints

At the beginning of the paper I have made a remark by quoting Dummett that in analytic philosophy there is no separate existence of thought apart from language. To hold this, thus implies that grasping the structures of a sentence involves grasping the structure of the thought it expresses.

It is evident that Davidson is not an exception to this approach. That is the reason why he never felt the urge to probe whether language presupposes any higher order relationship. I shall now try to argue that there is a higher order relationship which may be described in terms of a set of presuppositions. These presuppositions are indispensable for communication and thus they are crucial in determining the concept of truth.

Let us begin with the notion of objective truth since this is central to Davidson's whole enterprise. Davidson's concept of objective truth is really the concept of intersubjective truth[20] to which we arrive at through interpretation. In concrete terms, what actually matters is successful communication which is possible by virtue of a theory of the world shared by both the speaker and the hearer. However, our possession of a common theory of the world does not ensure the objectivity of truth. As suggested, the only way to do this is to go into the presuppositions that will reveal what is involved in our possession of a shared world about which we can communicate. It is this more of reasoning which will show why there is a theory of the world which is necessarily possessed by all of us. The study of such presuppositions is really meant to be the study of the conceptual structure and its bearing on the theory of the world.

A speaker forms the idea of a shared world on the basis of a kind of reasoning that involves: first, the idea of an objective temporal order and a set of basic principles which is constitutive of his thinking.

The Objective Temporal Order

The idea of objective temporal order is a proposal offered by John Campbell[21] while he tries to explain the presuppositions of communication. The best way to approach this will be to find out what is involved in giving an account of communication. According to Campbell "an account of communication must depend on the idea of different perspectives on the same temporal order."[22] The central idea involved here is perception. My perception is explained by the way things objectively are and our own position in this order. Through this way I determine the concept of objective truth.

Coming back to our central notion, the subject acquires the notion of the objective temporal order independent of whether he perceives it or not. How does he then get this notion? Campbell suggests a few conditions which he calls enabling conditions of perceptions. The subject acquires the knowledge of the objective/temporal order through fulfilling these conditions. In the context of the present discussion, these conditions are crucial in forming the shared view of the world without which, as we know, there will be no communication.

The first enabling conditions of perception are spatial. In order to see something the speaker must be appropriately situated in relation to it. For example, he can touch something only when he is spatially contiguous to it.

The second important thing is that these spatial conditions are necessarily accompained by various temporal co-ordinates. That is, we meet these spatial conditions in appropriate time. That is, when I perceive something "perception and the perceived are in general,.simultaneous."[23] Equally important here is to accept that there are objects which are unperceived but nevertheless they are intelligible to us. Hence, for example, how do we account for the fact that 'a is F" is intelligible even though we cannot perceive it? We say that 'a is F" is intelligble by virtue of our lnowledge that a' s being F does not provide us the sufficient ground to perceive that a is F. In order to perceive this we need additional enabling conditions.

The third important enabling condition is that for understanding the object we must have a sense of causal order. We know that objective order of events is not determined by the way we perceive things. As a result, we could distinguish "between perception of successive states of affairs and successive perception of coexistent states of affairs."[24] But this distinction cannot be made by appealing to the order and content of perception. We thus appeal to the causal order. With the help of the causal order exhibiting regularities we can understand the thing in rest, in motion, and so on.

The objective temporal order along with the enabling conditions of

perception form an abstract thought of objects/spatial objects which make the 'cognitive map' (to use Campbell's phrase) of the world possible. This cognitive map is more like an abstract structure. It does not concern with any particular object or with any particular point of view. It is a picture which is constituted of certain regulative principles that tell us how the world functions and how the objects behave. This account is a bare outline explicating the idea of a shared world about which we communicate. However, the possession of this shared world does not deny differences. The reason is the speaker knows that there are other points of view on the same objective order giving rise to "different courses of perception of the same world - a world about which communication is therefore possible."[25]

Constraints of thought

There are global constraints on the ascription of thought. Out thinking is, to a great extent, structured by these constraints. It may be said that we think at the background of these constraints.

First :

The Intelligibility Constraint.- It says that to have a concept implies that one must have a range of concepts. It provides the context within which each concept is intelligible. To grasp a concept implies to grasp a system of concepts. This constraint thus says that a subject is a possessor of concepts.

In addition to the above claim this constraint also, as Campbell pointed out, about the permutation of thought. To ascribe one set of propositional attitude to a subject implies that he should be capable of grasping wide range of thoughts. This is possible because the subject in a situation can permute the concepts which were already ascribed to him at the initial state of situation. Suppose if the speaker fails to do the adequate permutation then it implies that there is something wrong in the initial ascription.

Second :

Generality Constraint. - This is a constraint proposed by Gareth Evans.[26] It says that for someone to have the thought that 'a is F' is to

know what it is for something to be a and on the basis of this he must be capable of grasping the thought like *a is g, a is H* and so on. Similarly, to have the thought that 'a is F' one must also know what it is to be $\underline{F}$ so that one can grasp the further thoughts that *b is F, C is F* and so on. This generality constraint tells us how we grasp inferential relation holding between different thoughts. This also enables us, as Campbell argues, to make different permutations among different thoughts.

Third :

Conceptual Creativity. - This is not a constraint. It is an element which is necessarily involved in inferential relations of thought. This notion has its significance, as Campbell pointed out, due to Frege.[27] Conceptual creativity implies our ability to spot a new pattern in a familiar thought.

To conclude, the cognitive map provides us the idea of an objective world shared by all of us together with a set of principles by which we identify, compare and interpret the thoughts of others. It is due to these basic cognitive presuppositions that we are able to understand the rival view points expressed by different cultures. The truth of these view points is that they may be incompatible and even incommensurable but they are not incomparable. This realization is the basis of our agreement in communication. This is the sense in which, I suggest, that Davidson's theory of the world requires higher order justification. It also makes it evident that we first interact with the world through thought because language functions through thought. The relationship between thought and reality may be thus said to be prior to the relationship between language and reality. This may be taken as the realist demand.[28]

NOTES

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2.   Davidson, D. 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', in *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, p.199.

3.   Pradhan, R.C. *Truth, Meaning and Understanding: Essays in Philosophical Semantics*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1992.

4.   Davidson, D. 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning,' in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation,* p.153.

5.   Davidson, D. 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' in E.Lepore(ed)., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson.* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

6.   Davidson, D. 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', in *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation,* p.201.

7.   Davidson, D. 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', in *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation,* p.142.

8.   Eldridge, R. 'Metaphysics and the Interpretation of Persons: Davidson on Thinking and Conceptual Schemes', *Synthese,* 66, 1986.

9.   Davidson, D. *Thought and Talk,* in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation,* p.157.

10.   *Ibid,* p.157.

11.   *Ibid,* p.157.

12.   *Ibid,* p.170.

13.   *Ibid,* p.170.

14.   Eldridge, R. 'Metaphysics and the Interpretation of Persons: Davidson on Thinking and Conceptual Schemes, *Synthese,* 66,1986 p.486.

15.   Davidson, D. 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', in *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, p.199.

16.   *Ibid.,* p.200.

17.   *Ibid., p.200.*

18.   *Ibid., p.201.*

19.   Davidson, On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', *Inquiries into Truth*

and Interpretation, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, p.197.

20.   Davidson, D. 'Rational Animals', *Dialectica*, 36, 1982,p.327.

21.   Campbell, J. 'Conceptual Structure' in *Meaning and Interpretation*, Basil
       Blackwell, Oxford.

22.   *Ibid.*, p.161.

23.   *Ibid.*, p.162.

24.   *Ibid.*, p.162.

25.   *Ibid.*, p.164.

26.   Evans, G. *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.100.

27.   Frege, G. *The Foundation of Arithmetic*, Oxford University Press, 1978,
       sec.88.

28.   This paper is based on the lectures delivered in the National Symposium on
       the Recent Perspectives in Western Philosophy held at Pune University in
       December,1997. The part of this paper was also presented in a National
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       ber,1993.