

Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective, by Donald Davidson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. Pp. xviii + 237. P/b £16.99, H/b £42.50.

Problems of Rationality, by Donald Davidson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. Pp. xx + 280. P/b £16.99, H/b £42.00.

Truth, Language, and History, by Donald Davidson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. Pp. xx + 370. P/b £16.99, H/b £40.00.

These three volumes, comprising forty-three essays dating from 1982 to 2001, bring together virtually all of Donald Davidson's work not collected in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980; reissued 2001; henceforth 'EAE') and *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984; reissued 2001; henceforth 'ITI'). The most significant omissions have now been published separately under the title *Truth and Predication* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). This includes, as chapters one to three, Davidson's 1989 Dewey Lectures at Columbia University, 'The Structure and Content of Truth', originally published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1990, and, as chapters four to seven, his 2001 Hermes Lectures on 'The Problem of Predication'.

Davidson's work has had a pervasive influence on analytic philosophy since the publication of 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes' in 1963 and 'Truth and Meaning' in 1967. It is difficult to imagine what the landscape of philosophy would look like today without his presence. The appearance of these three volumes is therefore a major philosophical publishing event, which makes easily accessible, as did the two earlier volumes, many important but scattered and hard to find essays. This is especially important for a philosopher like Davidson whose primary output has been in the essay form but whose work is both wide ranging and systematic.

The three volumes are organized thematically. *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (SIO) collects essays on the nature of, and connections between, knowledge of our own minds, the minds of others, and the external world. *Problems of Rationality* (PR) collects essays on the role of rationality in our self-understanding, specifically with respect to our understanding of the objectivity of at least some basic shared values, the nature of thought and the explanation of our actions, and the nature and limits of irrationality. An appendix includes a fascinating interview with Davidson by Ernie Lepore. The more heterogeneous *Truth, Language, and History* (TLH) includes essays on truth, the social nature of language and its literary use, the relation of mental events to causation, causal explanation and causal laws, themes from the history of philosophy, and some replies to commentators.

These essays are largely developments, refinements, articulations, or applications of themes or ideas already present in Davidson's earlier essays. I concentrate on the following topics: meaning and language, the concept of objectivity, epistemology, rationality and irrationality, the objectivity of value, and anomalous monism. I presuppose a basic acquaintance with Davidson's work in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* and *Essays on Actions and Events*.

(a) The theory of meaning and language

(i) The Unified Theory. Radical interpretation is the centerpiece of Davidson's philosophical project. Radical interpretation is interpretation on the basis of a subject's behaviour, without prior knowledge of its thoughts or language. Radical interpretation is taken to be methodologically basic because it represents the requirement that linguistic meaning be in principle publicly available. Davidson famously casts the project in the form of confirming an axiomatic truth theory for a speaker's language whose canonical theorems are to meet an appropriate analogue for natural languages of Tarski's Convention T. In the initial phase of his work on radical interpretation, Davidson gave a central role to evidence, at an intermediate stage, in the form of hold true attitudes (beliefs that sentences are true). Correlations of hold true attitudes with conditions in the environment provide tentative assignments of truth conditions which interpret the sentences held true (this is the operation of the Principle of Charity: assume the speaker is mostly right about his environment). On this basis, an interpretive truth theory for the language is developed.

In 'Belief and Meaning' (ITI, pp. 147–8) Davidson suggested the possibility of an integrated theory of decision and interpretation, which takes preferences for the truth of one sentence over another as evidence for the theory. This idea is developed in 'A Unified Theory of Thought and Action' (PR, Ch. 10), though it informs many other essays in these collections. Decision theory takes choice behaviour as a guide to preferences, and preferences are treated as the outcomes of desires of varying strengths and degrees of belief. Standard decision theory takes for granted our ability to interpret a speaker's utterances, so that we can tell what he believes he is choosing between. We unify the theory of decision and interpretation when we support a theory of a speaker's language and the attitudes underlying his choices all at once. The unified theory aims to uncover both preference rankings and degrees of belief. The latter provide a more sensitive test of attributions of meanings by taking into account the degree to which an agent takes certain beliefs to support others. This provides insight into beliefs relatively remote from observation. An agent's preferences for truth among sentences depends on what he thinks they mean, his degrees of belief, and his subjective utility ranking. The main result is a procedure for identifying a truth-functional operator equivalent to the Sheffer stroke (interpreted as 'not both') on the basis of patterns of preferences among sentences containing an independently identified sentential connective. This enables one to identify negation, which by standard procedures yields assignments of degrees of belief and utilities. With information about sentences held true (and to what degree now) in response to stimulus from the environment, this provides the basis for formulating an interpretive truth theory for the agent's language.

(ii) The reality of language. A second development involves the role of public languages in understanding communication. It is represented primarily by three essays in TLH (Chs 7–9), 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' (1986), 'The

Social Aspect of Language' (1994), and 'Seeing Through Language' (1997). The first is famous for claiming that 'there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed' (TLH, p. 107). This has been taken to be incompatible with Davidson's previous work. However, 'The Social Aspect of Language', in response to criticisms from Michael Dummett, provides important clarification. Davidson is not denying that a speaker's dispositions impose on his utterances a pattern that allows a systematic interpretation of them, which can be captured with a truth theory, meeting appropriate constraints, which provides satisfaction conditions for his words and truth conditions for his sentences. Davidson challenges rather the claim that *shared prior knowledge of conventions* is *necessary* for communication and, therefore, the conceptual primacy of public languages in communication. This amounts to the claim that there is no such thing as a language *only if* one builds into the notion of language, non-standardly, the requirement that it be something involving conventions prior knowledge of which is essential for communication. So interpreted, the thesis in fact follows from taking the standpoint of radical interpretation as basic in understanding linguistic meaning. For if the radical interpreter's evidential base of behavioural dispositions suffices in principle to interpret another, then no prior knowledge of shared conventions is necessary.

(iii) Triangulation. That there is an essential social element to meaning also follows from taking the stance of the radical interpreter as basic. Davidson exploits this in a number of essays (SIO, Chs 3, 5–9, 13–14; PR, Ch. 9) in spelling out what objective facts determine what a speaker is talking and thinking about. Identifying what a speaker responds to in holding true a sentence about his environment requires saying which of the many, even regular causes, of his hold true attitudes it is about. Davidson proposes that the speaker's thought is about the link in the causal chain leading to it which is the common cause of the speaker's and interpreter's responses (see esp. SIO, pp. 119, 203, 212–3; PR, pp. 142–3). The basic pattern of communication in the case of a speaker and interpreter requires responses to each other and to the same common features of the environment. This forms a triangle between the common cause of their responses (the two legs) and their responses to each other (the base). If we assume that interpreter and speaker can communicate, in principle, then the answer to the question what the speaker is thinking and talking about is what the interpreter can find him to be talking about so as to put them in communication.

This is a clever idea to get around a difficult problem for nomic regularity accounts of thought content. However, it succeeds only if it does not allow different interpreters, sensitive to different common causes, to interpret the speaker as speaking about radically different things, for example, distal events or events wholly at his sensory surfaces. It is not easy to see why this should not in principle be possible.

(b) The concept of objectivity

An important argument in these later essays is that having the concept of objective truth (or error) requires that we be or have been in actual communication with others (SIO, Chs 3, 7, 14). The argument goes as follows.

- (1) To have the concept of a belief one must have the concept of error, or, what is the same thing, of objective truth. (SIO, p. 104)
- (2) That something possesses the concept of error, or objective truth, stands in need of grounding: this must take the form of explaining how there could be scope in its behaviour or experience for application of the concept. (Implicit premiss)
- (3) There is scope for the application of the concept of error in interpretation to achieve a better rational fit of a speaker's behaviour to the evidence we have for his beliefs and meanings. (SIO, p. 105)
- (4) There is scope for the application of the concept of objective truth in a creature's behaviour or experience only if it is (or has been) in communication with others. (SIO, p. 202)
- (5) Therefore, from (2) to (4), to have the concept of error or objective truth one must be (or have been) in communication with others.
- (6) Therefore, from (1) and (5), to have the concept of belief one must have a language and be (or have been) in communication with others.

This is a transcendental argument in that it represents communication as a necessary condition on having the concept of belief and objective truth. Together with the assumption that to have belief one must have the concept of belief, the conclusion here secures also that language is necessary for thought.

I raise two questions. First, is the second premiss true on an interpretation that secures that (5) will follow from (2) to (4)? If we accept that there must be scope for the application of a concept (at least for basic concepts) within our experience for us to have it, we may still read 'experience' either subjectively or objectively. We may require only that our subjective experience represent something in relation to which it would be appropriate to deploy the concept or that our experience veridically represent something in relation to which it would be appropriate to deploy the concept. Davidson needs the objective reading, yet it is not clear why the subjective reading is not adequate. Second, why think there is scope for the application of the concept of error only in communication? Why not, for example, in relation to our beliefs in the light of new evidence?

(c) Epistemology

A number of papers draw out epistemological implications of Davidson's account of the nature of language (SIO, Chs 1–2, 11–14). Traditional foundationalism held that knowledge of our own minds was most certain and the foundation for our knowledge of the external world and, given knowledge of the

external world, of the minds of others. Davidson seeks a transcendental grounding of knowledge in all three of these domains in the same source. The fundamental premiss is that to be a speaker is to be interpretable, that is, to be such that another can come know what one means by one's words. Knowledge of the external world, one's own mind, and the minds of others is derived as a condition on being interpretable. We then infer that we have knowledge in each of these domains from the fact that we are linguistic beings and therefore interpretable.

First, with respect to knowledge of our own minds: to be interpretable, correlations between one's hold true attitudes and what is going on in one's environment must provide a reliable guide to what one is thinking and what one's words mean. But a hold true attitude is a belief that a sentence is true which is based on a belief about how the world is and what one believes the sentence (in the context) means. Hold true attitudes can play their evidential role only if the interpreter assumes that the speaker knows (or is very reliable about) both what he believes and what his sentences mean. (I give here a simpler, more straightforward, argument than Davidson does (primarily in SIO, Chs 1–2, 4), but one which is implicit in the account of radical interpretation; his argument falls short of what is needed. See Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, Ch. 20.)

Second, with respect to knowledge of the external world: to be interpretable, (i) one cannot be largely mistaken about one's environment or (ii) largely mistaken in one's general beliefs, especially those which make sense of one's having thoughts with certain contents. (Davidson calls (i) the Principle of Correspondence and (ii) the Principle of Coherence (SIO, p. 211)—these were both formerly subsumed under the Principle of Charity (ITI, pp. 136–7, 152–3, 168–9).) Therefore, one's beliefs about the external world, especially those that involve responses to the environment, cannot be largely mistaken. Given this guarantee that one's beliefs are largely correct, one can rely on coherence among one's beliefs as a test for probable truth.

Third, with respect to knowledge of other minds: to be interpretable is to be such that another can come know what one means by one's words. It follows that one can know facts about other minds. More specifically, adopting the stance of the radical interpreter as basic presupposes that the radical interpreter's evidence suffices in principle to come to know what another means by his words and, since this is necessary for that, to know much about what he believes, wants, hopes, intends, and so on.

Two main questions arise about this argument. The first is whether being a speaker entails being interpretable in a strong enough sense to get the results Davidson wants. The second is whether, granting that it does, we are in a position to know that we are speakers in the relevant sense. I consider here only the first. The ground for the claim that being a speaker requires interpretability lies in Quine's observation that '[l]anguage is a social art'. Nothing counts as speaking a language which no one else could in principle understand. So far so

good. But Davidson's argument requires a very strong reading of this. It requires holding that in any environment a speaker is radically interpretable by some speaker. This ensures that true belief about the external world is constitutive of a speaker. However, if it is enough to satisfy the interpretability requirement that any speaker be interpretable by someone in some possible environment, then it does not follow that true belief is constitutive of a speaker. Arguably the observation that language is intrinsically social does not require more than that a speaker may in principle be interpreted in an appropriate setting, that is, a setting in which he has mostly true beliefs about his environment (see Lepore and Ludwig, Ch. 19).

(d) Rationality and irrationality

Four essays in PR (Chs 11–14) deal with the nature of irrationality. As Davidson puts it, the paradox of irrationality is that it 'is a failure within the house of reason' (PR, p. 169). The possibility of irrationality should seem especially puzzling against the background of a theory of action like Davidson's, according to which nothing is an action unless it is caused by reasons of the agent which rationalize it. Rationality is built into the concept of agency. How then can irrationality arise? Several important themes emerge in Davidson's response to this question.

The first is introduced in his earlier paper 'How is Weakness of the Will Possible?' and elaborated in these essays. It rests on Davidson's view that the propositional attitudes are not just reasons for actions and thoughts but also causes of them. This allows that reasons may point in one direction, while lines of causal force lead in another. One form of irrationality arises when a cause of an action or thought (broadly construed) is not a reason for it (though this is not a sufficient condition), as in the case of wishful thinking (EAE, pp. 178–180). More generally, a pattern of attitudes may point to one belief, intention, or action as best, yet cause another, as in weakness of the will.

The second theme is that 'irrationality is a perturbation of rationality', that is, a breakdown in a largely rational pattern of attitudes. Unless we find another to be largely rational, we cannot find him to be a thinker at all: 'mental states and events are the states and events they are by their location in a logical space' (PR, p. 184). Thus, unless another is largely rational, he cannot be irrational. It follows that no belief or desire is irrational in itself. Irrationality is a relational property of an attitude.

The third connected theme is that irrationality is an objective feature of a pattern of attitudes (see esp. PR, Ch. 12). It involves inconsistency amongst an agent's attitudes from his own point of view, but that point of view is objective because the norms of rationality are constitutive of the propositional attitudes in the sense that identifying a particular attitude requires locating it among other coordinate attitudes.

The fourth, introduced for the first time in these essays (esp. PR, Chs 11, 13), is that irrationality requires to some degree a partitioning of the mind into

semi-autonomous domains of attitudes which function to some degree like persons, which can then have a causal influence on the others and the person who harbours them, independently of what reason all-in recommends for him. It is paradoxically the tension between the second theme and the first that gives rise to the pressure to identify autonomous domains of attitudes whose evolutions taken by themselves are rational.

(e) *Objectivity of value*

The Principle of Charity enjoins us to find another believing and behaving rationally and as having largely true beliefs. In a series of papers, reprinted here for the first time, beginning in 1984 with his Lindley Lectures, Davidson has sought to extend the reasoning behind the Principle of Charity to establish an objective basis for shared values. The central idea is captured in these passages:

It is possible ... to show that the justified attribution of values to someone else provides a basis for ... the interpersonal comparison of values. But the comparability of values does not in itself imply agreed-on standards, much less that we can legitimately treat value judgments as true or false. Now I ... suggest that we should expect enlightened values—the reasons we would have for valuing and acting if we had all the (non-evaluative) facts straight—to converge; we should expect people who are enlightened *and fully understand one another* to agree on their basic values. An appreciation of what makes for such convergence or agreement also shows that value judgments are true or false in much the way our factual judgments are. (PR, p. 49)

Good interpretation makes for convergence ... and on values in particular, and explains failure of convergence by appeal to the gap between apparent values and real values ... Thus there is a basis for the claim that evaluations are correct or incorrect by interpersonal—that is, impersonal, or objective—standards ... disputes over values ... can be genuine only when there are shared criteria in the light of which there is an answer to the question who is right ... The importance of a background of shared beliefs and values is that such a background allows us to make sense of the idea of a common standard of right and wrong, true and false. (PR, pp. 50–1)

The first stage of this argument aims just to establish that interpersonal comparisons of value are possible, that is, that we can rank values not only relative to an agent, but between agents. The second aims to establish that basic disagreements over values make sense only against a background of agreement, particularly on the criteria for evaluation. A model for what Davidson has in mind is attribution of the norms of rationality to another. On Davidson's view, the norms of rationality are constitutive of the propositional attitudes in the sense that unless one is mostly rational, one is not an agent at all. Thus, to see others as agents we must find them following norms of rationality, even if they do not endorse them explicitly. Their adherence to these norms is secured as objective by that being a condition on anything being an agent.

The difficulty is to extend the claim from shared norms of rationality to shared values generally. Unfortunately, in this connection, it is difficult to find much argument, as opposed to persuasive rhetoric, in these essays. The norms of decision theoretic rationality require me to find another as ranking his own

ends, as I rank mine. But why must I rank his ends relative to mine? Even if this were secured, why should I not find him to have many interests I lack? Why, on matters on which we are both not indifferent, should our preference rankings match even roughly? Perhaps some common interests must be shared if two speakers engage in a talk exchange. But this seems at best a narrow ledge to stand on. While suggestive, these essays fail to make clear either the scope of the claim of shared values or in detail what the supposed necessity of shared values is, beyond a kind of argument by analogy with Davidson's standard argument for the necessity of shared belief.

Even if we accept the suggestion that evaluative judgements in virtue of their form must be accepted as being true or false, it is unclear that the general requirement on finding another mostly right requires that we find him mostly right, by our lights, about values, for evaluative beliefs do not enter into interpretation in the direct way non-evaluative beliefs do. Particular evaluative beliefs are prompted by general evaluative beliefs and factual beliefs. So the correlations between hold true attitudes and events in the environment which make interpretation possible do not in the first instance involve particular evaluative beliefs. There is no *prima facie* reason to think that merely having the concept of something's being valuable in one or another dimension requires two speakers to think the same things valuable.

(f) *Anomalous monism*

Anomalous monism (AM), introduced in 'Mental Events' (1970), holds that every mental event is token identical to some physical event, but that there are no strict psychological laws. The argument for anomalous monism rests on the following premisses:

- (1) Every mental event stands in a causal relation to some physical event.
- (2) If two events stand in the causal relation, then there are descriptions of them under which they are subsumed by a strict law.
- (3) There are no strict psychophysical laws.
- (4) The physical is governed by a closed comprehensive system of laws.
- (5) If there are no strict psychophysical laws, then the only strict laws governing the physical are physical laws.
- (6) If an event is subsumed by a strict physical law, then it is a physical event.

(1) is the Principle of Causal Interaction. (2) is the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality. A strict law is one that 'there is no improving in point of precision and comprehensiveness' (EAE, p. 223). (These may, as Davidson notes in one place (TLH, p. 205), be probabilistic.) (1) and (2) entail that there are strict laws relating mental to physical events; given this, (3) to (5) entail that the strict laws relating mental to physical events are physical laws. Given this and (6), it follows that every mental event is a physical event,

though there are no strict psychological laws. In his original work on AM, Davidson assumed (1) and (2), and argued for (3). (4) to (6) have the status of implicit assumptions of the argument.

The argument for (3) is notoriously difficult. The basic thought is that lawlikeness of sentences admits of degrees; the highest degree of lawlikeness is possessed by strict laws; strict laws must be members of closed comprehensive systems of laws; such systems of laws are governed by a unifying set of constitutive principles governing the application of basic concepts which are deployed in the laws; the mental and the physical vocabularies involve different unifying sets of constitutive principles; therefore, there cannot be strict laws couched in a mixed vocabulary of mental and physical terms. That strict laws are members of closed comprehensive systems of laws which have a unifying set of constitutive principles rests on Davidson's epistemic conception of laws: laws are true generalizations which support counterfactuals, are supported by their instances, and are projectible to unobserved instances. The thought is that where constitutive principles governing different predicates are markedly different, there can be no confidence that observed correlations involving them will continue, with the highest degree of projectibility, to the future. Also crucial to the argument is the claim that the attribution of propositional attitudes is constitutively governed by the norms of rationality.

This is my reading of the argument in 'Mental Events'. However, in 'Laws and Cause' (TLH, p. 204), Davidson emphasizes that the mental cannot be part of a closed causal system, presumably because there are always physical events which are not mental which cause mental events. If this is what drives the argument, then it is shorter: the mental is not part of a closed causal system. Only a closed causal system is amenable to strict law. The mental is not amenable to strict law. However, while no purely mental system of laws could be strict if the mental is not closed, it remains unclear why there could not be strict psychophysical laws.

There have been two important further developments in Davidson's defence of AM. The first is his defence in 'Thinking Causes' against the charge 'that AM makes the mental causally inert' (TLH, p. 185). The second is a long awaited defence of the Nomological Character of Causality in 'Laws and Causes'.

'Thinking Causes' defends the consistency of AM with the premisses it rests on and with supervenience. As Davidson explains supervenience here, 'a predicate p is supervenient on a set of predicates S if and only if p does not distinguish any entities that cannot be distinguished by S ' (TLH, p. 187), offering this as a clarification of his earlier formulation. This formulation contains no suggestion that there are any laws connecting p with any predicates in S . All it requires is that if p can be used to distinguish x from y , for example, by being true of x and false of y , then there is a predicate s in S such that it can be used to distinguish x from y by similarly being true of x and false of y . It may be a brute matter of fact that this is so. This secures AM against the charge that supervenience, as David-

son understands it, is incompatible with the claim that there are no strict psychophysical laws. On a different, common way of characterizing supervenience, there is a potential problem. If we say (to switch to property talk) that

- [S] a family of properties F supervenes on a family of properties G iff for any x , for any $f \in F$, if x has f , then there is a $g \in G$ such that x has g and necessarily, for any y , if y has g then y has f

then, if there are strict laws involving the properties in G , there are strict laws involving the properties in F . Davidson's clarification of what he intends by 'supervenience' avoids this problem. Is the account of supervenience that Davidson gives here, however, the same as the account he gave in 'Mental Events'? Davidson said,

Such supervenience might be taken to mean that there cannot be two events alike in all physical respects but differing in some mental respect, or that an object cannot alter in some mental respect without altering in some physical respect. (EAE, p. 214)

These formulations are equivalent to the 'Thinking Causes' formulation provided that we understand 'cannot' as 'cannot compatibly with supervenience', for then the 'cannot' does not enter into the content of the claim that is used to characterize supervenience.

What of the charge that AM makes the mental causally inert? Davidson responds by pointing out that he is committed only to there being no *strict* psychophysical laws; in this respect, psychology is no worse off than the other special sciences, and any charge that the lack of strict laws in psychology leads to epiphenomenalism with respect to the mental would equally show that the properties attributed using the vocabulary of geology leads to epiphenomenalism with respect to them. (Thus, it is open to Davidson to accept a non-strict nomic supervenience thesis.)

Davidson urges further that even if there were no psychophysical laws, it would not follow that the mental was causally inefficacious, in the sense that 'mental properties of an event make no difference to its causal relations' (p. 196). For supervenience itself guarantees that the mental properties of an event make a difference to its causal relations. In what sense? Apparently, in the sense that any mental change implies some physical change and so some difference with respect to properties that enter into laws. If, however, the idea of the causal efficacy of some property is conceptually tied to its entering into a natural law, then the difference that mental events make that is derived from the sort of supervenience Davidson endorses is not enough. For supervenience, as he states it, is a *de facto* thesis, which has no nomic force. If it is intended to be stronger, then it will collapse into [S], and will require, after all, strict psychophysical laws. However, it is enough to blunt the charge that AM implies the causal inefficacy of the mental that it does not deny psychophysical laws *per se*, but only strict psychophysical laws.

AM relies on the assumption that singular causal statements are backed by strict laws. Why believe this? Davidson offers an answer in 'Laws and Causes' (TLH, Ch. 14). Davidson takes laws to be true universally quantified state-

ments which support counterfactuals and are confirmed by their instances. They contain no singular terms referring to particular objects, times or places, and if strict, do not contain any *ceteris paribus* clauses. The argument Davidson sketches here focuses on the concept of an event. An event is a change. The notion of a change, Davidson argues, is not equivalent to that of a property's applying at a time and not subsequently (or vice versa). The central idea is that 'events are changes that explain and require such explanations' (TLH, p. 212); but the explanations must be run in terms of features of events, and so every singular causal statement implies the truth of a covering law. That is, the concept of an event is a kind of epistemic concept, in the sense that it is the concept of something that can be cited in a covering law explanation under some description, and so the concept of a change that can be canonically described using predicates which can be paired with predicates to make a projectible pair. This is, as Davidson notes, a Kantian theme: for what changes there are in the world is a matter on this view of how we can make it intelligible, that is, explainable. This still leaves us short of the requirement that singular causal statements be backed by *strict* laws. If I understand Davidson correctly, the gap is to be bridged by seeing the ideal of strict laws as what we aim for in identifying events, so that *ceteris paribus* laws are but a gesture at the canonical descriptions of events at which we aim.

Concluding remarks. Davidson's philosophical project is one of the most remarkable and productive of the twentieth century. It develops and synthesizes a number of important themes in philosophy stretching back to the modern period. In closing, I wish to make some synoptic remarks about Davidson's position in the twentieth century tradition in philosophy to set the collections of essays reviewed here both in light of Davidson's earlier output and in the broader course of philosophy.

Davidson's project is best seen as a development of the broadly empiricist arc of Anglo-American philosophy. Quine was the greatest influence on Davidson, as Carnap was on Quine. Quine got from Carnap his fundamentally empiricist outlook on meaning. Two things structured Carnap's outlook. The first was the view that truths can be divided into the analytic (hence, a priori, and, hence, necessary) and the synthetic. The second was the view that the meaning of synthetic statements was to be sought in their connection with sensory experience. This went through two transformations in Quine's work. The most fundamental was the rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Without this, the distinction between philosophy and science is erased and, as Quine saw it, also the status of philosophy as providing a foundation for the pursuit of empirical investigation of the world. Philosophy becomes continuous with science and distinguished by being pursued at a greater level of generality than the disciplinary sciences. The study of language and knowledge becomes part of the general scientific enterprise and so subject to the constraint of coherence with theories in other domains. This gives rise to the second transformation, which is the substitution of stimulation of the sensory

surfaces for sensory experience in the project of providing a scientific account of meaning and our cognitive contact with the world. In the theory of meaning, the result is that sameness of meaning is understood in terms of responses to patterns of sensory stimulus. Once we give up the view that sensory experience is an epistemic foundation for knowledge of the world (a view that can be maintained only with the analytic-synthetic distinction), there ceases to be any need to give it a privileged place in the reconstruction of meaning on an empirical basis. Meaning must be understood from a third person stance (for '[l]anguage is a social art'), and this makes sensory experience seem peculiarly unsuited as a basis for understanding. Extruding it to its proximal surface cause is a conservative modification of the empiricist theory of meaning. Davidson takes over from Quine the third person stance, and the view that in matters of meaning and psychology the content of the concepts we use to deal with them are to be explicated in terms of their organization of a body of observational data. But the observational basis takes one more step toward objectivity in becoming the shared distal environment of speaker and interpreter. In this final outward step, the vestige in Quine's philosophy of the traditional role of sensory experience in empiricism, as the basis of meaning and knowledge of the external world, is removed. It is a strange journey empiricism has taken, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, one of those transformations of a philosophical view, through a series of internal changes, into something that seems to turn it on its head, and whose resemblance to its progenitor can be understood only by tracing the changes by which the transformation was accomplished.

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Ignorance of Language, by Michael Devitt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. viii + 304. H/b £30.00.

Devitt is an avowed friend of the generative enterprise; his brief is to offer an alternative to Chomsky's 'psychologistic' construal of the 'wonderfully successful' work of linguistics, much of it Chomsky's own, of course (p. 3). Hence, Devitt's title: 'a person could be competent in a language without representing it or knowing anything about it: she could be totally *ignorant* of it' (p. 5). While I agree with many of Devitt's negative conclusions, his positive claims are way off target. To de-psychologise linguistics is a fool's errand, at least if linguistics is to remain an empirical discipline. (Due to space, an issue I shall sideline is whether Devitt can be so sanguine that current generative theory does not carry substantive commitments to a certain psychological design. This issue is