ANTIREPRESENTATIONALISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR REALISM

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Antirepresentationalism and its Consequences for Realism

by

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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Memorial University of Newfoundland

July 2004

St. John's   Newfoundland

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Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

Abstract

Richard Rorty argues that the subject-object picture of knowledge has been more trouble than it is worth and the realism, built upon it, should now be viewed as a defunct position. Donald Davidson's antirepresentationalism, Richard Rorty argues, reveals the unintelligibility of the realist position; realism depends upon the implausible notion of truth as sentences corresponding to (picturing or representing) the facts. Given antirepresentationalism, Rorty argues, we have to accept the idea that nothing makes a sentence true and drop the ambitions and intuitions inspired by the traditional but problematic dualism. Alternatively, Rorty suggests that we embrace the natural outcome of antirepresentationalism, that is, a new and bold pragmatic antirealism; antirealism denies both the objectivity of truth and the independence of the world.

In this thesis, I challenge Rorty's claim that Davidson's antirepresentationalism necessarily leads to antirealism. The dismissal of representation heralds the end of a variety of plaguing epistemological problems; yet what remains unclear is whether this abandonment should also bring a loss of objectivity and invite a rejection of an independent world. As we shall see, Rorty's antirealism is not our only option post-correspondence because Davidson provides us with a viable realist alternative; furthermore, our analysis will reveal Rorty's position to be internally incoherent.

The conclusion of this thesis is that realism can survive, with considerable adjustment, the shift to the new causal/semantic picture of language. Davidson's philosophy of language spells out how we can remain committed to the realist's ambition of objectivity and its intuition of a world out there. Language is not a mirror or lens but it is through having a language that we see the world.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to challenge Richard Rorty's antirealism and determine whether the realist position can survive the downfall of the representational model of language. Philosophy is both troubled and obsessed with the epistemological gap presented by the subject-object picture of knowledge. Traditionally, idealists sought a solution to this dichotomy through ontological homogeneity whereas metaphysical realists turned to correspondence truth theory. Both programs have now come to be seen by many as failures.

What we are to make of realism after the fall of the subject-object picture is unclear. Can an objective relationship between language and reality be rearticulated? Or, does the rejection of the subject-object architecture destroy the possibility of objectivity and eschew discussion of realism? Richard Rorty opts for the latter and argues that our only option post Donald Davidson's antirepresentationalism is antirealism. Rorty endorses a radical turn inward, a move away from objectivity and a rejection of externalism. Do we have to follow him into antirealism? I urge that we do not.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject-object picture and clarifies the realist and antirealist positions. I present Ludwig Wittgenstein's (early position) and W. V. O. Quine's positions as prime examples of the representational models of language that are giving us such trouble. I also introduce Alfred Tarski's work on constructing truth theories for formal languages. Explicating the views of truth of these three philosophers places our analysis in the context of some of the central debates in analytic philosophy and explicates the issues that motivate antirepresentationalism. I explain Davidson's antirepresentationalism as a critique of the realist idea of sentences confronting the facts.

Davidson's antirepresentationalism, according to Rorty, suggests a radical way out of the subject-object picture; and, Rorty draws a strong antirealist conclusion - the denial of objective truth and the rejection of an independent world. According to Rorty, antirealism is the only option post-correspondence.

I argue that we do not need to go that far. Rorty's antirealist conclusion can be denied on two counts: it is not our only option post correspondence and I will uncover serious tensions in Rorty's position that reveal it to be an unviable option. As I see it, if we can provide an account of the objectivity of true belief post-correspondence we will get realism more or less for free. Davidson's philosophy of language, I argue, allows us to do just that.

In Chapter 2 I examine Rorty's rejection of objective truth and develop Davidson's reaffirmation of objectivity. According to Rorty, the loss of confrontation between language and world means that we have to take the ubiquity of language seriously and adopt a solely negative approach to truth. Rorty introduces three nullifying substitutes for truth, i.e., the commendatory, cautionary and disquotational truth theories; these avoid defining truth, avoid giving substantial accounts, and embrace a negative position. Justification looks better than truth and Rorty opts for solidarity over objectivity - establishing an ethnocentric limit on truth. Davidson denies that the content of the concept of truth can be contained within disquotational limits.

Davidson recognizes the ubiquity of language, avoids metaphysical correspondence and examines truth 'at home', that is, from within his own language. Given Tarski's work, the construction of a truth theory for a particular language reveals that while true-in-L is not totally trivial, reference and correspondence remain internal to

a particular language's employment of the concept of satisfaction. Hence, disquotation's normative limit appears secure; though Davidson claims to be filling-in the content of the concept of truth and admits he is defending a much larger account of truth than Rorty permits.

From within the requirements of interpretation and communication Davidson shares the insight that communication requires the concept of charity. Charity brings out the essential semantic relations between meaning, belief and truth which demonstrate that beliefs are veridical (speakers cannot be mostly wrong about what there is) - that is, all language users employ a transcendental truth in communication. Davidson's defense of the massive truthfulness of belief is supported by a required externalism (inherent in his rejection of scheme-content dualism and his theory of communication); together, they endorse a semantic realism. Davidson shows that truth escapes Rorty's ethnocentric limit and is, in fact, something much more central.

Triangulation is the source of all objectivity between speaker, community and world. Triangulation sets out the conditions necessary for the emergence of error, which is the condition of learning and understanding the truthfulness of a sentence and, as such, makes objective truth, language and thought possible. Davidson's philosophy of language reveals that truth is our most basic concept - it is a condition of speech - but is one that remains unproblematically undefined. As a condition, truth allows language to be an organ of propositional perception. Language is neither a veil nor a lens but it is by virtue of having a language that we know the world; we see the world through having a language.

Davidson gives us a vivid reformulation of the realist position; his semantic realism overcomes the antirealism objections, reaffirms the objectivity of truth, and returns us to the world (establishes an externalism). We can drop the subject-object picture and remain realists because we compromise and amend the traditional position. Keeping the objectivity of truth (including its explanatory value and central status) and denying antirealism means remaining *modest* about truth and how our language connects us to the world.

In Chapter 3 I reinforce my above analysis by presenting a series of critical conclusions regarding Rorty's position. Arguing from further exposition of Davidson's theory of communication and Rorty's liberal political theory (which he constructs from his antirealists conclusions) I use the implications of Davidson's position for convention and community to show that Rorty's 'we', that is, his liberal community of speakers, is an artificially imposed boundary. Because all language users share objective truth, our ethnocentric differences do not reach the depth Rorty has supposed - that is, they do not go all the way down - we have more in common than our ability to feel pain. Rorty's philosophy has missed the absolute centrality of truth for language and this unfortunately separates linguistic communities further than they all ready are. I also discuss Frank Farrell's criticism that there is a deep instability within Rorty's position between commonsense realism and antirealism. This contradiction demonstrates how dangerously close Rorty veers to linguistic idealism. These difficulties provide, I argue, enough evidence for abandoning antirealism as a viable alternative to realism.

We know that Rorty places antirealism as the natural outcome of antirepresentationalism and the only option post-correspondence. I find no good reason

why we should accept either of these claims. The conclusion reached in this thesis is that while the subject-object picture burdens realism with outdated metaphysical representational machinery, getting rid of it does not usher in antirealism: realism can survive antirepresentationalism.

Chapter 1

Correspondence, Realism and Antirepresentationalism: Rorty's Antirealism

1.1 Introduction

Can philosophy 'get things right' or provide the thinker with an accurate picture of reality? The idea that it can goes as far back as Plato, who, in giving us a perceptual metaphor of knowing, suggested that the mind's contents mirrored a transcendent reality. A bifurcated reality consisting of a mind standing opposed to the world, that is, disparate ontological realms of belief and non-belief, needing mediation, forms the subject-object picture. The history of philosophy contains various attempts to meet the challenge of how the inner world of the subject and the outer reality of objects could be aligned so as to make knowledge possible. Today, Rorty argues, philosophy is still struggling with this picture's need of transcendence, which is responsible for an endless and unproductive philosophical debate. The picture has "held us captive. And we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language and our language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."[1]

In modern philosophy consciousness was traditionally considered the medium between the two realms - a medium either of expression or representation. Cartesian philosophy is notorious for introducing this idea through its model of consciousness as a medium that presents mental representations of the world to its audience (the subject). Between the subject and the world Descartes envisioned

> the *thought balloon*, a free floating package of ideas that is always distinct from the world of matter... [i]t depicts representation, the mental model of the world... [i]t implies interiority, popping as it does from the head... [i]t assumes an inner

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, translated by G. E. M Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1958), p. 48, no. 115.

speaker or illustrator, and an inner witness. And its cloudiness suggests its emergence from a nonphysical dimension.[2]

Descartes bequeathed a picture of the subject in direct contact with the mental, with sensory perceptions of the world, as opposed to the world in itself, forever putting the latter in doubt. What emerged was the possibility of global or 'Cartesian' skepticism, that is, the idea that we could be wholly wrong about the world.

Philosophers who aimed to solve the puzzle of the subject-object picture have often argued for the primacy of one side of the dichotomy over the other. The realist versus idealist debate is one result. Realists argued that knowledge of the *real* world was the primary concern and constructed philosophical systems that aligned the subject's thoughts with the world (or experience). Although the realist position can be characterized in many ways,[3] in this thesis I am concerned with realism as a general position and, more specifically, with the downfall of metaphysical realism. The traditional realist commitment can be summarized in three central theses: first, that objects exist; second, that these objects exist independently of our experience; third, these objects have features that exist independently of our descriptions. To put it another way:

> things known may continue to exist unaltered when they are not known, or that things may pass in and out of the cognitive relation without prejudice to their reality, or that the existence of a thing is not correlated with or dependent upon the fact that anybody experiences it, perceives it, conceives it, [speaks of it] or is in anyway aware of it.[4]

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[2] Dan Lloyd, "Popping the Thought Balloon, " in <u>Dennett's Philosophy: A Comprehensive Assessment</u>, ed. Andrew Brook, et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p. 174.
[3] For a wide variety of realist positions see Susan Haack, "Realism," in *Synthese, no. 73, 1987*, pp. 275-276. Philosophers who view the world, without good reason, as existing as their senses tell them are called naïve realists.
[4] Herbert W. Schneider, "The Program and the Platform of Six Realists," in <u>Sources of Contemporary Realism</u> (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 39.

The realist values the intuition that there is a world 'out there' of definite character existing independently of language and seeks to articulate the relationship between language and the world so as to account for knowledge.

Alternatively, idealists tried to solve the puzzle of the subject-object picture by arguing that the world was a construction of consciousness and an expression of the inner nature of the subject. Proponents of idealism refused to split reality and, therefore, avoided explaining truth as a relation between *separate* realms of belief and nonbelief. They moved from the failure of correspondence to defining truth as coherence; they explained correspondence in virtue of the latter by viewing the world as comprised of coherent system of representations. In redefining 'world' as a 'system of representations' they established 'ontological homogeneity' and thought they had outmaneuvered skepticism. According to Rorty, realism and idealism are related philosophical errors. It was the unfortunate hunt for genuine knowledge of the intrinsic nature of reality that kept realism and idealism together in a common philosophical pursuit. The realist-idealist debate continues because both positions and their oppositions are interlocked; "[t]he familiar trouble is, of course, that the [subject-object] disconnection creates a gap no reasoning… can bridge. Once the Cartesian starting point has been chosen... idealism ...empiricism, and skepticism loom."[5]

The *metaphysical* realist takes the realist's inclinations further; he attempts to mediate the cognitive and noncognitive realms by positing a noncausal relation called truth. In the metaphysicalist's view, knowledge is achieved by articulating objectively

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[5] Donald Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," in Language, Truth and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion, ed. Nancy K. Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), p. 300.

true sentences that correspond to (match, represent or picture) reality. He constructs a noncausal metaphysics of correspondence in which our truth-bearing sentences have to match the nonlinguistic 'truth-makers' or facts in order to have, and presumably in order for us to be able to explain their, 'aboutness'. G. E. Moore argued, for example, that a fact or "a truth is the sort of thing which corresponds to a true belief."[6] Metaphysical correspondence radically separates truth from the realm of the mental; in other words, truth is 'radically nonepistemic'.

The metaphysical realist, according to Rorty, defends an *unglossable* notion of truth that makes us mappers of something language independent; with representation the metaphysical realist seeks an "unclouded Mirror of Nature."[7] Below we shall examine how the early Wittgenstein and V. W. Quine construct such metaphysics. While we can see that the metaphysical realist's discussion revolves around the nature of truth, realism, in general, incorporates any philosophical doctrine that sees genuine knowledge as dependent upon and 'about' an external nonlinguistic world. Realism, I argue, does not require a representationalist theory of truth.

1.2 Wittgenstein's Pictures and Games

The early Wittgenstein constructed a metaphysics of correspondence with his representational picture theory of meaning - meaning is truth-functional, that is, meaning is equivalent to what it is for a sentence to be true. Wittgenstein's picture theory conforms

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[6] G. E. Moore, "Truths and Universals," in Some Main Problems of Philosophy (New York: MacMillan, 1953), p. 311.
[7] Richard Rorty, "Epistemology and the Philosophy of Language," in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 308.

to the subject-object picture: language can get things right and sentences can be objectively true if the appropriate match is struck between truth-bearing sentences and the truth-making facts. Wittgenstein argues that the world divides into atomic facts, or states of affairs, and that the world is "a totality of facts, not of things."[8] Facts are comprised of objects and both exist in logical space. Wittgenstein provided the correspondence mechanism in the propositional function. Elementary propositions consist of names and assert a state of affairs; names fit variables, such as 'x', and their immediate combinations are functions or predications like '[ ] is red'. The general form of the propositional function is 'F[x]'. The function is the device by which the object is introduced into logical space and mapped. Thus, operations of the propositional function assign truth-value to propositions by the accuracy of that mapping or correspondence; as Wittgenstein states "[t]he picture agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false."[9]

Wittgenstein's architecture provides a representational account of language and meets the requirements of the subject-object picture. Wittgenstein's correspondence truth theory determines a picture's truth-value by comparing it with reality; truth is achieved when the logical structure of the proposition matches the formal structure of the world - the proposition is then an accurate depiction of reality. When the propositional function maps the variables onto the particular range of the function – the range being a predication, it outlines the relationship between objects and their arrangements – it linguistically mirrors the existence of a state of affairs. Our mappings present to ourselves pictures of facts that are models of reality. Through accurate mappings we know the

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[8] Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, ed. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 31, no. 1.1.
[9] Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, p. 43, no. 2.21.

world as it is in itself; our sentences "describe the scaffolding of the world."[10] Although

language and reality share the same logical form this means

> only that without language we could have no connected, systematic experience,
> no world. While our language determines the scope of meaningful discourse, and
> thus limits the possibilities within our world; it does not and cannot determine the
> existence or nonexistence of anything within the world.[11]

Wittgenstein thus propagates the subject-object distinction via a separation of the

empirical and the grammatical.[12]

Wittgenstein later challenged his early representational position with his

Philosophical Investigations. He insists, in this work, that we ignore his former position's

narrow representational definition of language. The very endeavor to solve the subject-

object picture by constructing a metaphysics of correspondence arises, accordingly,

because we have misunderstood language. The subject-object picture provided

philosophy with a troublesome picture of language's mediation between us and the world;

it tempted philosophers to seek the unalterable form of the world and ask unnecessary

questions about the essence of language; it produced "deep disquietudes; their roots as

deep in us as the forms of our language."[13]

Wittgenstein challenged representationalism by dropping the idea that language

"always functions in the same way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts –

which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please."[14] Instead

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[10] Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, p. 165, no. 6.124.
[11] Alexander Maslow, "Objects, Atomic Facts, and Language," in A Study in Wittgenstein's Tractatus (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. 23.
[12] Wittgenstein continues to 'toy' with this distinction throughout his Philosophical Investigations - see Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," in The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, ed. Charles B Guignon (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 345.
[13] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 47, no. 111.
[14] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 102, no. 304.

of providing sentences that are 'about' or 'true of', Wittgenstein considered language to be a contingent, loose grouping of different socially defined linguistic behaviors. Without a central purpose the language to world relation was no longer an immense puzzle (which when properly fitted together allowed us to match reality or discover the truth of the world). What we call having and using a language, Wittgenstein saw as distinct phenomena that "have no one thing in common... but ...are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all language."[15]

Wittgenstein's later account helps look beyond the atomism and representationalism of his early position; he suggested that we make everything linguistic intrinsically relational and opt for understanding language holistically - as inclusive to a "set of indefinitely expansible social practices."[16] He posits the value of language in relation to a game, practice or society's behavioral/linguistic norms. He moves from the idea of language as composed of metaphysically independent relata to "the assumption that all [linguistic] entities are merely nodes in a net of [social] relations."[17] When we speak we make a move in a language game; moves are defined according to, and given credence by, the rules established in that very practice and are equivalent to customs or societal institutions. Playing such linguistic games is equivalent to living a certain way - our language games reflect our form of life and demonstrate how interwoven it is with language;

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[15] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 26, no. 53.
[16] Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," p. 344.
[17] Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," p. 345.

Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description (a drawing); reporting an event; speculating about an event; forming and testing a hypothesis; making up a story... reading it; play-acting; singing catches; guessing riddles; making a joke; telling it; solving a problem in applied arithmetic; translating from one language into another; asking; thinking; cursing; greeting; praying.[18]

Without giving a systemic theory of meaning, Wittgenstein posits the significance of a sentence in its actual relations to other sentences; "whether a sentence had sense did indeed depend upon whether another sentence was true - a sentence about the social practices of the people who used the marks and noises which were components of the sentence."[19] Meaning lies in a variety of conventional social linguistic practices - though variable, every word exists in a web (or family) of meanings. Words are given meaning given their place in the holistic organic mesh that is our linguistic behavior. Language, like a game, remains something to be mastered and thus separates the indoctrinated from the outsiders. We understand particular words in relation to a particular training; without particular training words can mean anything, or, alternatively, they can mean nothing at all.

The later Wittgenstein has no systemic theory of truth either. Wittgenstein likens correspondence to a mechanism in which propositions (cogs) that engage with 'truth'; this contact produces (churns out) 'contact with' and 'truths about' the world. Thinking of truth as correspondence as the only form of contact with reality is equivalent to saying

'The king in chess is *the* piece that one can check.' But this means no more than that in our game of chess we only check the king. Just as the proposition that only a *proposition* can be true or false can say no more than that we only predicate 'true' or 'false' of what we call a proposition.[20]

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[18] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 11, no. 23.
[19] Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," p. 344.
[20] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 52, no. 136.

Language outlines the nature of our socially institutionalized practices; as such, it is unrelated to objectivity. Instead of philosophically high minded ideas of mirroring or corresponding, Wittgenstein suggests alternatively that language functions on the practical level as a tool for coping with the world; he wants us to think of the functions of words as varied and as diverse as the functions of tools in a tool box. We cannot justify how or why we speak the way we do in relation to 'getting things right' – all we can say is that these are the tools we use: "[t]his is simply what I do."[21] If we ask how it is that our tools engage with the world or help us cope, Wittgensteinians (e.g. Rorty) liken language to an animal's horns or survival behaviors like burrowing. Rather than representing, a sentence's truth-value is determined by the appropriateness of the speaker's linguistic move within the game in which she is situated - as there are many moves within many (a possibly infinite number of) language games there are as many truths. In our game we surround the notion of 'truth' with specific practices, rules and beliefs but these remain simply *our* practices. We are in contact with reality all the time but formalize it in our practice in particular (and unnecessary) ways. Wittgenstein continues to separate what we say (the grammatical) from what is (the empirical realm). The world exists independently of language but when we speak we obey a custom that has no value in relation to a philosophy of representation.

The analysis of Wittgenstein's rejection of his earlier model of language yields insight into how a representational picture is constructed and abandoned. The later Wittgenstein challenges the assumption that language is a representational medium; by developing an increasingly naturalized account he drops the metaphysical notions of

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[21] Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, p. 85, no. 217.

meaning and correspondence to the facts. Language is something to be mastered; meaning isolates communities of convention. Wittgenstein leaves, however, serious questions as to the possibility of objectivity.

1.3 Tarski's Truth Theory

Alfred Tarski's work constructing truth theories for formal languages[22] greatly influenced the positions of Quine, Davidson and Rorty. An adequate truth theory, for Tarski, accounts for all the uses (or the extension) of the predicate 'is true' in relation to the sentences of a given language L. To do so, Tarski argues, it must abide by Convention T. Convention T gives us the minimum criterion needed to develop a truth theory or define 'truth' for L and provides two constraints on a truth theory. First, all sentences of language *L* will be provable in the T-sentence theorem '(T) The sentence *s* of *L* is true if and only if *p*'. Second, all sentences provable in the T-sentence theorem are *true*. Any definition of truth must satisfy these two constraints. Guided by Convention T we can construct a truth theory by producing a list of all 'true' sentences or by recursively generating such sentences from logical axioms. Convention T sets the parameters for constructing a truth theory for language *L*. Each T-sentence is a partial definition; the totality of T-sentences gives us a theory of truth for a particular language.

In place of a correspondence truth theory Tarski has a leaner notion of satisfaction, which, although extensional, makes reference "nothing but a semantic abstraction."[23] Tarski considers truth to be a characteristic of sentences. Sentences start out open and are

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[22] Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

closed when they are satisfied. An open sentence is 'x loves y' and a closed sentence is

'Jack loves Jill'. Sentences are satisfied as functions are filled. Thus filled the function f

satisfies "an unstructured n-place predicate with variables in its n-places if the predicate

is *true of* the entities (in order) that the function assigns to those variables."[24] A sentence

is satisfied when the objects are mapped onto the sentence by the sentential function;

> Whether or not a particular function satisfies a sentence depends entirely on what
> entities it assigns to the free variables of the sentence. [F]unctions… map the
> variables of the object language on to the entities over which they range….[25]

At the base of a truth theory are the axioms that are satisfied by all sequences or objects;

this reveals a first order quantificational structure. Complex sentences are built out of

these axioms. For a complex satisfied sentence to be true it has to be recursively tested

against the basic axioms out of which it was built -

> the recursive characterization of satisfaction must run through every primitive
> predicate in turn. It copes with connectives in the obvious way; thus a conjunction
> of two sentences s and t (open or closed) is satisfied by f provided f satisfies s and
> f satisfies t.[26]

Closed sentences that meet the recursive test are true. Tarski's truth theories could

not explain or define a particular truth for L without satisfaction. As we shall see, Tarski's

truth theory is used as a basis for a theory of communication, explicates semantic

relations between meaning, belief and truth and it is seen, by some philosophers, as a way

to limit unnecessary philosophical theorizing about truth.

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[23] Bjorn Ramberg, "Reference," in <u>Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 34.
[24] Donald Davidson, "True to the Facts," in <u>Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 47.
[25] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 47.
[26] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 47.

1.4 Quine's Schemes

Quine, Davidson's analytic forebearer, set out in his paper "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism" to improve empiricism, a position which holds that the contents of the senses serve as the ultimate evidence for the truth of our sentences. Quine did so by explicitly challenging two dogmas: the analytic/synthetic distinction and reductionism.

The analytic/synthetic distinction focuses on the traditional distinction between sentences that are true by virtue of their meaning alone and sentences whose truth depends upon the facts. Quine finds the substitutes of synonymy and definition insufficient to explain the concept of analytical truth and drops the idea of meaning and the possibility of confirming the truth of sentences individually. Instead, Quine opts for a holism in which there is no significant distinction between analytic and synthetic truths. Reductionism is also rejected on the basis of Quine's holism. Quine denied the possibility that individual sentences are (or could be reduced to) empirically significant units of language. For Quine it is our entire body of theory - our conceptual scheme - that meets experience as a whole.

However, Davidson would go on to argue that Quine's project is not at an end because empiricism contains a third dogma, that is, scheme-content dualism. Quine's success at destroying the first two dogmas, Davidson argues, drives us straight into the third dogma:

> The dualism of the synthetic and the analytic is a dualism of sentences some of which are true (or false) both because of what they mean and because of their empirical content, while others are true (or false) by virtue of meaning alone, having no empirical content. If we give up the dualism, we abandon the conception of meaning that goes with it, but we do not have to abandon the idea of empirical content: we can hold, if we want, that *all* sentences have empirical content. Empirical content is in turn explained by reference to the facts, the world,

experience, sensation, the totality of sensory stimuli, or something similar... Thus in place of the analytic-synthetic we get the dualism of scheme and content.[27]

What is a conceptual scheme? Quine envisions a theory (or language) as a transcendental organizing scheme. This scheme serves to provide a representational medium between a diametrically opposed subject and world (as such, the third dogma is a continuation of the traditional subject-object dichotomy). The scheme organizes the content of experience (a.k.a. sensory promptings, data). Content is essential for without it thoughts (or sentences) "are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[28] In Quine's model, the contents of experience take the place of traditionally troublesome facts, that is, as epistemological intermediaries between language and what it is 'about'. The medium presents to the subject sentences that have been matched (and, therefore, been given truth-values) to the proximal content that language has, reciprocally, organized. This means that our ontology is based on our scheme's particular organization, so the familiar objects of our world – trees, rocks, rain, etc. - are constructions that are "conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries... simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer."[29] In this way, a scheme makes 'the world' intelligible by constructing a relative ontology - what is real in our scheme may not be so in another. A scheme that organizes content in a manner significantly different than our own (to the point where these differences impede communication) is incommensurable.

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[27] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 189.

[28] Immanuel Kant, "Introduction: Idea of Transcendental Logic," in The Critique of Pure Reason, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 93, A51/B75.

[29] W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism," in From a Logical Point of View (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 44.

Quine objects to the traditional model of meaning inherent in the analytic-synthetic distinction; Quine calls such an appeal the 'idea idea' or 'museum myth' model "in which the exhibits are meanings and the words are labels. To switch languages is to change the labels."[30] The older model was problematic in divorcing semantics from the world. Quine claims that it

> is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. The statement 'Brutus killed Caesar' would be false if the world had been different in certain ways, but it would also be false if the word 'killed' happened to rather have the sense of 'begat'. Thus one is tempted to suppose in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component. ...it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component is null; and these are the analytic statements. But, for all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn.[31]

And, like the later Wittgenstein, Quine challenges one-to-one correspondence between theory/sentences and facts. He is opposed to reductionism and its verificationist theory of meaning, in which each statement "is associated [with] a unique range of possible sensory events such that the occurrence of any one of them would add to the likelihood of truth of the statement."[32] The verificationist theory appeals to facts and, in doing so, reinforces the analytic-synthetic distinction. Because we can make no sense of separating the truth of a sentence into its linguistic and factual components, Quine abandons the idea of atomistic correspondence (facts) in favor of holistic confrontation (via sense data). Our

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[30] W.V.O. Quine, "Ontological Relativity," in Ontological Relativity and Other Essays (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 26.
[31] Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism," p. 36.
[32] Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism," pp. 40-41.

sentences are measured against the 'tribunal' of experience "not individually but only as corporate body."[33]

Quine thinks we are better off without 'meaning'. Understanding language and meaning holistically means understanding linguistic relations in an all-encompassing causal web of relations. Where the later Wittgenstein refused to give a systemic theory of meaning, Quine challenges 'meaning' by turning from epistemology to semantics:

> the question whether two expressions are alike or unlike in meaning has no determinate answer, known or unknown, expect insofar as the answer is settled in principle by people's speech dispositions, known or unknown.[34]

Understanding the meaning of a foreign speaker (or native) becomes a matter of understanding speech dispositions from within a linguistic-causal nexus, that is, it becomes a matter of translation.

Radical translation is a heuristic tool built from scratch, that is, it is translation without previous exposure to the linguistic behavior (and meaning) of a speaker's alien tongue. Translation is a relation between two languages that can and often does involve up to three languages, that is, the object language, the subject language, and the metalanguage; these are "the languages from and into which translation proceeds, and the language of the theory, which says what expressions of the subject language translate which expressions of the object language."[35] Quine's method of translation proceeds by providing a syntactical equation of sentences along Tarskian lines. The translator is guided by the criterion that in any translation (radical or otherwise) "what it is for a

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[33] Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism," p. 41.
[34] Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism," p. 29.
[35] Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 129.

speaker to belong to a given speech community is that translation manuals that work for the community work for him."[36] To translate effectively we need a listing of translations of the object language's sentences s into the sentences p of the subject language (*L*). The translation manual we need is a potentially infinite listing of the analytic hypotheses 's in L translates into p'. All intelligible translation occurs against a 'background theory' or one's own language; "the universe of a theory makes sense only relative to some background theory, and only relative to some choice of a manual of translation of one theory into the other."[37] A translation scheme requires an understood tongue or metalanguage (English or whatever home language one has - in which the translator already understands the meaning of sentences), only then can one understand the meaning of sentences translated from the object language to the subject language; only then can we say that we are translating properly.

We translate even when communicating within the confines of our own language. For example, the sentence 'Snow is white' is taken as uttered in the object language English or 'E'. This sentence is to be translated into the subject language (which also happens to be 'E') via the language of the theory (which again is English) or metalanguage 'meta-E'. When I define "'true in E' in meta-E in such a way that 'Snow is white' is true in E if and only if snow is white...each sentence of E is to be translated 'homophonically' into meta-E."[38] In other words, each sentence of E gives it own translation into an equivalent sentence in meta-E. To translate in this way is to take one's

[36] Donald Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," in Perspectives on Quine, eds. Robert B. Barrett, *et al.* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 71. Also see: Donald Davidson, "Thought and Talk," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 161.
[37] Quine, "Ontological Relativity," pp. 54-55.
[38] Hilary Putnam, "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," in Words and Life (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 338.

own language at face value or its meanings as transparent and self-evident - it is a 'disquotational... procedure'.[39] Nonetheless, it is still only 'true-in-L'.

Without a traditional theory of meaning, even with the Tarskian translation tool, the interpreter only has access to what is observable in the natural world. Observable behavior is understood as very general attitudes towards sentences confirmed by "the objective forces that [the interpreter] sees impinging on the native's surfaces."[40] They combine to form 'observation' sentences and are all the basic evidence an interpreter can rely upon in constructing a theory of radical interpretation. Observation sentences are the key to translation; they are particular sentences that we directly associate with the presence of particular stimuli. Such sentences remain tied to the proximal sensory stimuli and their 'observational' aspect is identifiable merely by the behavioral criterion of assent by members of the same speech community. Observational sentences achieve assent by stimulating "the same total set of receptors"[41] on differing occasions; such sentences are to be understood in purely causal-behavioral terms.

We can equate sentences of different tongues because meaning is dependent upon proximal stimulations. Quine's proximal theory of reference ties meaning and belief to a mutual dependence upon the firing of sensory nerves - that is, it ties the two to "a brain state or change... [which] remains reassuringly physical and publicly observable, at least

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[39] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," p. 338.
[40] W.V.O. Quine, "Translation and Meaning," in Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), p. 27.
[41] W.V.O. Quine, "Empirical Content," in Theories and Things (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1981), p. 25.

in principle."[42] Meaning is thus 'stimulus meaning' and it provides a measure of the

sameness of meaning:

> Two observation sentences have the same meaning for a speaker if the patterns of
> stimulation that cause assent to one sentence cause assent to the other; similarly
> for dissent. An observation sentence s of one speaker has the same meaning as the
> sentence T of another speaker if the prompting patterns are approximately the
> same. This is the foundation of radical translation.[43]

This background allows the translator to begin the process of constructing a translation

manual; he disassembles

> heard utterances into conveniently short recurrent parts, and thus compiles a list
> of native 'words'. Various of these he hypothetically equates to English words and
> phrases.... Such are his analytic hypotheses.[44]

Their totality, in relation to radical translation, constitutes Quine's dictionaries/translation

manuals. Stimulus meaning suffices to give an adequate account of meaning without

'meaning' (and, indeed, without the concept of objective truth).

Quine argues that because the causal-semantic account of meaning so heavily

depends upon observation sentences it necessarily requires a complementary account of

language learning: a model where words (and, later, sentences) are learned "through the

conditioning of sounds or verbal behavior to appropriate bits of [observable] matter in the

public domain."[45] This conditioning is the original relation by which our terms and

comprised sentences gain meaning. Observation sentences are the gateway to language;

when we learn a language there has to be an arrangement that will allow the learner to

hear the sound, see the object and see that the speaker sees the object. This allows the

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[42] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 68.
[43] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," pp. 71-72.
[44] Quine, "Translation and Meaning," p. 68.
[45] Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," p. 301.

speaker to "key them [observation sentences] to current episodes... because other speakers, whom we imitate and who encourage our own behavior, have associated the sentence with those same ranges of concurrent impingement."[46] Although language is largely learned by mastering linguistic relations "somewhere there have to be nonverbal reference points...associated with the appropriate utterance on the spot."[47] The 'bits of matter' are important because they provide common ground; "...in their intersubjective intermediacy they are basic ...to language learning, because we learn a language from other people in shared circumstances."[48] Yet Quine's model of learning is not based upon a Kripkean building block theory of reference: the attempt to build up referential chains starting with relations between simple units of language, that is, words and predicates, and things, and then proceeding on to complex and compounded units, sentences, etc., so as to explain satisfaction and truth.[49] We do not understand sentences in isolation but holistically; as Putnam explains:

> I 'understand' the sentence 'Snow is white' in the sense that using that sentence in response to certain stimuli... is part of the complex, multi-tracked disposition which is my understanding of the language as a whole.[50]

But language is not learned or mastered in 'one mad scramble'[51] for such is indeed impossible.

When we learn a language we learn what the utterances of speakers in that language mean and this requires that we learn "what observations to count as evidence

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[46] W.V.O. Quine, "Breaking into Language," in The Roots of Reference (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1973), p. 42.
[47] Quine, "Breaking into Language," p. 37.
[48] Quine, "Breaking into Language," p. 36.
[49] Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).
[50] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," p. 334.
[51] Donald Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 7.

for and against them. The evidence relation and the semantical relation of observation to theory are coextensive."[52] Learning to speak a new language and trying to determine what another person means by their utterances are not distinct processes. Quine has shown that we cannot identify meaning in isolation and has demonstrated the relevance of the semantic context (over the epistemological) in understanding meaning and communication. Quine's success, according to Davidson, saved the philosophy of language "as a serious subject by showing how it could be pursued without what there cannot be: determinate meanings."[53]

Quine's model leads to the inscrutability of reference and indeterminacy of translation. Reference is inscrutable for it is unclear and, in principle, impossible to determine the objective nature of the source of stimuli which reciprocally provide stimulus meaning; translation is indeterminate for it is, again, unclear and, in principle, impossible to determine which translation is an accurate one. As an interpreter it "is important to think of what prompts the native's assent ...as stimulations"[54] and to remember that we do not have access to their world - their ontology is equally relative to their own language. When we attempt to translate a totally foreign tongue no exact translation is possible; a variety of equally good candidates will present themselves because we cannot appeal to 'real' objects as an objective measure of translatory adequacy. In guessing the possible reference points of utterances we can develop too many. Because all we have is stimulus meaning, what our words mean, like the objects we employ, is

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[52] Quine, "Breaking into Language," p. 38.
[53] Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in Reading Rorty, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 126.
[54] Quine, "Translation and Meaning," p. 30.

relative to our scheme. It is only in relation to our own background theory or language that can we translate a native's linguistic reactions to stimulations. References are, in Quine's view, equivalent to mythological posits. The best we can do in communication is to align the other's utterances (stated in an object language) with those of our own language (both subject and metalanguage) and chalk up communication problems to incommensurability. Quine considers these problems manageable and illuminative of the illegitimacy of the traditional notion of meaning; for Davidson, these problems are "a predicament from which we should take conceptual warning."[55]

Following Wittgenstein, Quine's empiricism is a holistic enterprise that threatens objectivity. Without one-to-one correspondence our statements face the tribunal of sense experience together but not all equally; only those at the periphery (observation sentences) have to be kept square with experience. Nevertheless, in Quine's view, individual sentences do not "admit separately of observational evidence. Sentences interlock. An observation may refute some chunk of theory comprising of a cluster of sentences"[56] while leaving the rest of the language intact. Furthermore, a partial refutation does not tell us which sentences to abandon. This means for Quine that the evidence relation, as well as the semantic relation, is indirect. Because different theories can account for and organize the entire corpus of observation sentences differently, Quine allows that

> a speaker or thinker at a given time operates with one theory, and for him at that time, the theory he is using is true and the other theory false. If he shifts to the alternative theory, then *it* becomes true and the previously accepted theory becomes false.[57]

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[55] Bjorn Ramberg, "What is a Theory of Truth?" in <u>Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 7.
[56] Quine, "Translation and Meaning," p. 38.
[57] Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," in *The Journal of Philosophy, vol. LXXXVII, no. 6, June 1990*, p. 306.

This means that the truth of sentences can only be articulated with a theory. Because we can not get past our home language or scheme the "idea that truth and falsity are substantive properties which sentences in any language possess independently of the point of view of the interpreter must be given up."[58] The measure of truth of a scientific theory now "depends only on how well it serves to explain or predict true observation sentences."[59] Quine's position proposes as many 'truths' about the world as there are theories; any sentence can be held true depending on the theory that is in place. Quine's empiricism opts for the primacy of evidence over truth; empiricism makes epistemologically significant "the obvious causal role of the senses in mediating between objects, our thoughts and talk about them; empiricism locates the ultimate evidence for those thoughts at this intermediary step."[60] Quine uses stimulations to tie meaning to evidence; the latter underlies the notion of a tribunal of sense experience against which our theory's truth is measured. Because evidence is primary but unconditioned (only to be made intelligible by the organizing scheme) Quine can treat truth epistemically and reduce it to the intratheoretical.

Quine's model also raises the problems of ontological relativity and skepticism. Many worlds are possible because beyond content there is something sitting 'out there' which is by its very essence ineffable. The model requires something like a radically non-epistemic Kantian noumenal realm outside language; the model requires "the notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable - the thing in itself, in fact."[61]

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[58] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something With Something Else," p. 336.
[59] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something With Something Else," p. 306.
[60] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 68.
[61] Richard Rorty, "The World Well Lost," in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 15.

Skepticism rears as holistic confrontation fares no better with the world than traditional one-to-one correspondence theory. Because organized contents are causally connected to sensory stimulations only, there are,

> if we stick to the proximal theory, no guarantees that we have even a roughly correct view of a public world. Although each speaker may be content that his view is the true one, since it squares with all his stimulations, once he notices how globally mistaken others are, and why, it is hard to think why he would not wonder whether *he* had it right. Then he might wonder what it could mean to get it right.[62]

Like sentences and facts, scheme and content are so diametrically opposed that it is hard to see how they could ever be brought together. How can language get a handle on content? There is no way to determine how "a move within a scheme is answerable to the deliverances of the senses."[63] The skeptic recognizes that even a justified theory can still be false. To base meaning on evidence "necessarily leads to the difficulties of proximal theories: truth relativized to individuals, and skepticism. Proximal theories, no matter how decked out, are Cartesian in spirit and consequence."[64] According to Davidson, Quine's position simply invites a rehash of global error; because Quine's model

> ...depended on something intermediate between its supposed object in the world and belief, skepticism was inevitable. This was ironic, of course, since one motive to turning to such 'evidence' as sense data was the fact that, not being propositional in character, no doubts about them could be raised.[65]

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[62] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 74.
[63] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 89.
[64] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 76.
[65] Donald Davidson, "Reply to John McDowell," in The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 105.

1.5 Antirepresentationalism

Frustration with the inability of representational models (whether one-to-one or holistic) to deliver on their promises of correspondence led many philosophers to question the viability of representation. Davidson abandons representationalism as a means for constructing a theory of objective truth and getting from language to the world; Rorty goes further and abandons the realist program altogether.

In Davidson's view, scheme-content dualism is an invitation for skepticism that demonstrates how little philosophy has traveled:

> skepticism rests on the assumption neither of sense data nor of reductionism, but on the much more general idea that empirical knowledge requires an epistemological step between the world as we conceive it and our conception of it, and this idea is at the heart of Quine's proximal theory.[66]

Taking lessons from the increasingly naturalized and causal accounts of the language to world relation, Davidson challenges the representationalism of Quine's scheme-content dualism. Conceptual scheme theory, Davidson argues, is unintelligible because of its appeal to truth-makers; that appeal

> betrays an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.[67]

Davidson follows Quine in understanding the meaning of sentences in the semantic context of translation. Differences between conceptual schemes are recognizable upon a total failure of translation; that failure

> is a necessary condition for difference of conceptual schemes; the common relation to experience or the evidence is what is supposed to help us make sense of the claim that it is languages or schemes that are under consideration when

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[66] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 74.
[67] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 184.

translation fails. It is essential to this idea that there be something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes.[68]

Davidson's rejection of scheme-content dualism is based on his objection to one-to-one correspondence truth theory, which requires a theory of individuated facts. Atomistic theories of reference open up the possibility that we might get things all wrong. Reference is a central part of the epistemological problem of representationalism. Like Quine, Davidson abandons the Kripkean 'Building-Block' approach to reference. To take the constituents of sentences as the significant units for truth is to "make abstractions serve as the explanatory foundations of their own source. That source is the truth value of sentences."[69] Davidson argues that unless we find a way other than correspondence to identify facts we will not be able to use facts to explain truth. Davidson agrees with C. I. Lewis and Gottlob Frege that "if true sentences correspond to anything at all; it must be the universe as a whole; thus, all true sentences correspond to the same thing."[70] If we cannot identify what fact a sentence corresponds to we might be better off talking about 'one big fact' instead of facts;

> Descriptions like 'the fact that there are stupas in Nepal', if they describe anything at all, describe the same thing: The Great Fact. No point remains in distinguishing among various names of The Great Fact when written after 'corresponds to'; we may as well settle for the single phrase 'corresponds to the Great Fact'.[71]

Correspondence of a sentence s to the 'Great Fact' is no more than saying 's is true'; this line of thought trivializes the notion of correspondence. According to Davidson, there is no entity that makes a sentence true;

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[68] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 190.
[69] Ramberg, "Reference," p. 34.
[70] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 303.
[71] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 42.

> Nothing, however, no thing, makes sentences and theories true: not experience, not surface irritations, not the world, can make a sentence true. That experience takes a certain course, that our skin is warmed or punctured, that the universe is finite, these facts, if we like to talk that way, make sentences and theories true. But this point is put better without mention of facts. The sentence 'My skin is warm' is true if and only if my skin is warm. Here there is no reference to a fact, an experience, or a piece of evidence.[72]

Atomistic theories of correspondence and reference are thrown out because neither plays an informative role in explaining the language to world relation. This is not to say that there are no causal intermediaries between language and the world but just that none of them have epistemological significance. This attack on facts is the basis of Davidson's antirepresentationalism.

Davidson refuses to accept confrontation appeals on either the atomistic or holistic levels. Any holistic appeal is still an appeal to truth-makers. An appeal to 'the totality of experience' is equivalent to claims concerning 'fitting the facts': neither adds anything to the concept of a language being true nor provides a means by which to test conceptual schemes. We cannot individuate a scheme's ability to fit an entity called 'the tribunal of sense experience' and so our description of an incommensurable conceptual scheme is "largely true but not translatable."[73]

1.6 Antirealism

Rorty's antirealism is greatly influenced by Davidson's antirepresentationalism; it shows, Rorty argues, the way out of the subject-object picture because it establishes an 'arch antirealist' position; it is

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[72] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 194.
[73] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 194.

the first systematic treatment of language that breaks completely with the notion of language as something that can be adequate or inadequate to the world or to the self. ...[it] breaks with the notion that language is a medium – a medium either of representation or of expression.[74]

The collapse of the subject-object picture, according to Rorty, replaced the struggle between idealism and realism with a "struggle between the pragmatists (who wanted to dissolve the old problems) and the anti-pragmatists (who still thought there was something first-order to fight about)."[75] Today's representationalists still maintain the intuition of a nonlinguistic world of objects with independent character and hope to figure out our relationship to it; thus, they inherit the burden of the realist-idealist debate. They still find representationalism, matters of fact and skepticism "fruitful and interesting".[76] The new pragmatists argue that because correspondence truth theory has been shown to be an uncashable and outworn metaphor antirepresentationalism is synonymous with antirealism.

When realists insist that we still have to attend to the world, the skeptic argues that we have "no way to hold onto the world in one hand and our descriptions of it in the other and compare the two... to get outside language games."[77] The skeptic pressures us to acknowledge that the representationalist position requires that "the world... [be] available to us only under a description... [and] the realization that it exists without a description, that it has no language of its own that we might one day learn."[78] Only

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[74] Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 10.

[75] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," in Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers: Volume I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 149.

[76] Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism and Liberalism," in Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers: Volume I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 2.

[77] Richard Rorty, "Cavell on Skepticism," in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 180.

[78] Rorty, "Cavell on Skepticism," p. 185.

realists, Rorty argues, worry about skepticism; antirealists drop the representationalist picture that feeds skepticism. An antirealist retains no notion "which would enable him to make sense of the claim that if we achieved everything we ever hoped to achieve by making assertions we might still be making false assertions, failing to correspond to something."[79]

In the essay "The World Well Lost" Rorty introduces his early antirealist position as a challenge to the Kantian model of the mind. While Rorty's earlier position ultimately proved to have 'idealist' difficulties it is still instructive. Kant's transcendental philosophy included a search for conditions of possibility as a means for establishing first philosophy; if one can give a priori conditions of experienceability then one could deliver "apodeictic truths... [&] the Kantian distinction between a priori and apodeictic and the a posteriori and relative would remain secure."[80] In the Kantian model, the mind contains active spontaneous faculties and passive receptive faculties; the former utilize the realm of the categories and are supposed to be capable of shaping the neutral material presented to it via the receptive faculties. Shaping is necessary for the "latter objects need to be related by the former... before they become available, before they can be experienced or described;"[81] this relating produces a phenomenal world for the subject.

> Kant's model is open to the possibility of different worlds and skepticism; the
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> possibility of different conceptual schemes highlights the fact that a Kantian unsynthesized intuition can exert no influence on how it is to be synthesized - or, at best, can exert only an influence we shall have to describe in a way as relative to a chosen conceptual scheme as our description of everything else. Insofar as a Kantian intuition is effable, it is just a perceptual judgment, and thus not *merely*

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[79] Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy," in <u>Consequences of Pragmatism</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. xxiv.
[80] Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," p. 341.
[81] Rorty, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language," p. 342.

'intuitive.' Insofar as it is ineffable, it is incapable of having an explanatory function.[82]

Such problems suggest, to Rorty, that we should drop the notion of receptivity and stop dividing the mind into parts. Without the faculty of receptivity, Rorty argues, "the notion of a neutral material becomes dubious... doubt spreads easily to the notion of conceptual thought as 'shaping'."[83]

Rorty seeks "a simple theory of the eye of the mind either getting, or failing to get, a clear view of the natures of kinds of things."[84] Representations, accordingly, are to be given up in favor of directly describing the world. Rejecting receptivity and nonepistemic neutral material delivers, according to Rorty, a beneficial trivialization of the word 'world'. Rorty asks that we choose between two attitudes towards the world – the radically nonepistemic and the pragmatic:

> I want to claim that 'the world' is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which are at the moment not being moved about ...epistemology since Kant has shuttled back and forth between these two meanings of the term 'world'.[85]

Rorty prefers the second attitude, though this position is not meant to be a metaphysical thesis nor a redefinition of the object of knowledge. In Rorty's view, the world still determines the content of belief; but all that

> 'determination' comes to is that our belief that snow is white is true because snow is white, that our beliefs about the stars are true because of the way the stars are laid out, and so on.[86]

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[82] Rorty, "The World Well Lost," p. 4.
[83] Rorty, "The World Well Lost," p. 4.
[84] Rorty, "The World Well Lost," p. 15.
[85] Rorty, "The World Well Lost," p. 15.
[86] Rorty, "The World Well Lost," p. 14.

We can hold onto a 'common-sense' notion of the world as the collection of natural objects like cats, dogs, trees and people; but this commonsense holism does not commit us to *any* belief in correspondence to a reality independent of belief.

Rorty's early position contains a serious problem he appears to iron out in his later antirealism. "The World Well Lost" was criticized as a migration into subjectivity.[87] Rorty agreed that his position did "takes sides between subject and object, mind and world... trying to glorify us at the expense of the world."[88] Rorty's later antirealism takes no sides but "tries to erase the contrast between them... trying to lose both us and the world."[89]

The 'real world', according to Rorty, is an unnecessary article of metaphysical faith. Since 'linguistic items do not represent any nonlinguistic items'[90] no description is an accurate representation of anything; we have here a "repudiation of the very idea of anything – mind or matter, self or world – having an intrinsic nature to be expressed or represented."[91] This repudiation suggests two possible forms for Rorty's mature antirealism; internal realism and strong antirealism. Rorty argues that his antirealism is an internal realism; following Putnam, internal realism is a "common sense realism: the realism that says that mountains and stars are not created by language and thought, and are not parts of language and thought, and yet can be described by language and

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[87] Frank Farrell, "Rorty and Antirealism," in Rorty & Pragmatism, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 175.
[88] Richard Rorty, "Response to Farrell," in Rorty & Pragmatism, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 191.
[89] Rorty, "Response to Farrell," p. 191.
[90] Richard Rorty, "Taylor on Truth," in Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question, ed. James Tully (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 2.
[91] Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," p. 4.

thought."[92] We have no trouble telling what our words or sentences refer to even though semantical notions (reference and satisfaction) are intratheoretical. But from another perspective Rorty is a '*strong* antirealist', for he denies that there is something underneath texts which texts are trying to convey; he "not only denies that the scientist puts us in touch with a transcendental intrinsic nature of the world; he doubts that there is an intrinsic nature of the world waiting to be discovered."[93] For this Rorty, there is no way the World is. Given the difficulties inherent in Rorty's position, which I discuss in Chapter 3, I find the latter characterization as the only one that fits.

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[92] Hilary Putnam, "The Question of Realism," in <u>Words and Life</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 303.

[93] Tom Sorell, "The World from Its Own Point of View," in <u>Reading Rorty</u>, ed. Alan Malachowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 11.

Chapter 2

Disquotation, Interpretation and Truth: Establishing Modest Realism

2.1 Nullifying Truth

In Rorty's view, antirepresentationalism permits us to replace representation and objective truth with a naturalistic account of linguistic activity as a tool, as means of coping. Such an account sees both body and speech as mutually evolved from the causal forces at play in the environment. In Rorty's model our vocalizations bring us no closer to nor make us more aware of that outer world "of things than do an anteater's snout or the bower-bird's skill at weaving."[1]

Rorty's objections against realism's conception of truth include, first, that metaphysical realism's appeal to facts appears to be an appeal to mysterious properties that "stand behind - both in the sense of remaining invisibly in the background and in the sense of guaranteeing - our ordinary ways of speaking and acting."[2] The ontological status of facts is unclear. Second, correspondence is mysterious because it relies upon the idea of noncausal relations. These relations provide access to an objective, noncausal 'truth about the world' and put us in contact with a supposed non-epistemic reality - the world outside the mental or linguistic realm. Rorty doubts whether anyone could ever recognize such a confrontation, let alone measure its adequacy. The idea of a 'truth-maker' engaging with a 'truth-bearer' summons a curious

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," in *The Journal of Philosophy, Volume XC, no. 9, September 1993*, pp. 447-448.
[2] Hilary Putnam, "Sense, Nonsense and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind," in *Journal of Philosophy, XCI, no. 9, September 1994*, p. 507.

mechanism outside the causal order of the physical world, a mechanism which could have or lack a quasi-causal property with which one might identify truth. Thus to say that our conceptual scheme is 'adequate to the world', is to suggest that some cogs and gears are meshing nicely - cogs and gears which are either nonphysical or which, though physical, are not mentioned in the rest of our causal story. To suggest, with the skeptic, that our language game may have nothing to do with the way the world is, is to call up a picture of a gear wheel so out of touch with the rest of the mechanism as to be spinning idly.[3]

Third, correspondence theorists utilize skyhooks, which would allow us to step outside our own language to see if the matching of language to world is adequate, if our language is fulfilling its representational role. As such, correspondence demands that finite speakers seek a 'God's-Eye' or Archimedean point of view where we stand inside and outside our language at the same time.

Rorty charges the realists with failing to provide an independent test for the accuracy of representation. He argues that representationalists cannot devise a "test distinct from the success which is supposedly explained by this accuracy."[4] Indeed, Davidson's antirepresentationalism has shown that we cannot identify

> in an instructive way... what fact or slice of reality it is that makes a particular sentence true. No-one has succeeded in doing this. If we ask, for example, what makes the sentence 'the moon is a quarter million miles away' true, the only answer we come up with is that it is the fact that the moon is a quarter million miles away.[5]

Realists cannot show us how correspondence offers a better explanation of true beliefs than the alternative pragmatic accounts of 'utility' or coping. Realism gives us no means to offer evidence contrary to the idea that a true belief's utility is equivalent to "the utility of a fulcrum or a thumb [which] has nothing to do with the 'representing' or

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[3] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 141.
[4] Rorty, "Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism and Liberalism," p. 6.
[5] Donald Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," in Rorty and his Critics, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), p. 66.

'corresponding' to the weights lifted, or the object manipulated."[6] Rorty simply applies

the pragmatic principle that 'what makes no difference to practice should make no

difference to theory' and in light of this principle he views the realist's notion of truth as

seriously misguided.

In denying the realist version of truth Rorty claims that he does not join rank with

the idealists. The idealist position on truth would always succumb, according to this line

of thought, to claims like Putnam's that "for any predicate P the idealist may want to

substitute for 'true' one can find a statement S such that 'S might have property P and still

not be *true*'."[7] The idealist's theory of truth cannot show how any particular belief, which

coheres with the mass, is itself *true*. Inferring that if we cannot make sense of truth as

correspondence we must redefine it in terms of ideal coherence is an error - it does not

lead us out of but back into the subject-object picture. Furthermore, in opting for truth as

coherence amongst representations, idealists deny ontological heterogeneity. But how is a

world of beliefs supposed to provide a bridge to a world of nonbelief? In redefining

reality, idealists, according to Rorty, wrongly redefined the object of knowledge. They

confused the loss of the intrinsic nature of the world with the unreality of space and time;

they mistakenly argued against commonsense that "human beings cause the

spatiotemporal world to exist."[8]

The idealist's denial of this *reality* and, conversely, the metaphysical realist's work

of "transferring this nonlinguistic brutality to *facts*, to the truth of sentences"[9] outline

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[6] Rorty, "Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism and Liberalism," p. 6.
[7] Hilary Putnam, "Reference and Understanding," in <u>Meaning and the Moral Sciences</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 108.
[8] Rorty, "The Contingency of Language," p. 4.
[9] Richard Rorty, "Texts and Lumps," in <u>Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: *Philosophical Papers, Volume I*</u> (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 81.

inversely correlative difficulties. William James' pragmatism, according to Rorty, is

decisive in thinking beyond these encumbrances. James defined truth as 'what it is good

for us to believe' and argued that the truth "was not an analyzable relation at all, not a

relation which could be clarified by... [a] metaphysical description of the relation

between beliefs and nonbeliefs."[10] He thought that we could get along fine with the

notion of justification and debunked truth as only an expedient. James erred, according to

Rorty, when he tried to give a positive account of truth as 'justified belief'. This latter

move is another form of the idealist error. We should not move from the failure to define

truth within one relation to attempting to define it in terms of another. We have instead to

make the negative move and forget the positive program; if we can do so then we can see

pragmatism as consisting "*simply* in the dissolution of the traditional problematic about

truth, as opposed to a constructive 'pragmatic theory of truth'."[11]

Rorty advocates a Wittgensteinian approach to determining the content of truth,

and he wants us to consider the various uses of 'true' as indicating not a substantially

unified concept but a much looser 'family resemblance'. Rorty claims we are better off

talking about uses; we should consider "whether we have sorted out the various uses of

the word 'true', decided which of them had better be discarded, and specified the

functions performed by the remainder."[12] According to Rorty, on truth the pragmatist can

do no better than James. Yet James' negative account of truth has come to be seen as

exceedingly narrow, allowing for an endorsing use of 'true' but not for cautionary and

disquotational uses. Davidson's linguistic theory (built into antirepresentationalism),

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[10] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 132.
[11] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 127.
[12] Richard Rorty, "Response to Donald Davidson" in Rorty and his Critics, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), p. 77.

Rorty argues, allows us to develop an account of truth that can handle these uses while limiting truth to an expedient.

Rorty argues that truth has an 'endorsing use'. We use the truth predicate to commend sentences that we find useful the same way we use cheers at a sporting event to express approval of winning players. Yet none of our predications or acclamations implicates a correspondence; each merely clarifies an "account of its approbative force."[13]

Truth also has a 'cautionary' use. This use can be seen in examples like "[y]our arguments satisfy all our contemporary norms and standards, and I can think of nothing to say against your claim, but still what you say might not be true."[14] Truth is cautionary in the sense that it can remind us that a sentence will not always 'pay its way', that there is no linguistic investment that is guaranteed to pay off.

What philosophers can learn from Davidson's philosophy of language, according to Rorty, is that the predicate 'is true' has a disquotational use on top of these normative uses. Davidson's treatment of truth reveals that

> there is nothing more to be known about the relation between beliefs and the rest of reality than what we learn from an empirical study of causal transactions between organisms and their environment. The relevant result of this study is the field linguist's translation-cum-ethnographic-report. Since we already have (in dictionaries) a translation manual for ourselves, as well as (in encyclopedias) an auto-ethnography, there is nothing more for us to know about our relation to reality than we already know. There is no further job for philosophy to do. This is just what the pragmatist has been telling the skeptic all the time.[15]

Davidson's treatment, according to Rorty, imposes strict ethnocentric limits on truth and reinforces the above two normative uses. The best we can get is truth defined in a

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[13] Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," p. 461.
[14] Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," p. 460.
[15] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 135.

particular language L - defined without a central status or explanatory value. In light of

disquotation's satisfaction relations, we should drop the idea that we are going to say

something substantial about L's relation to reality.

These three uses show us how far we can go with the notion of truth and still

remain negative:

> Philosophers who, like myself, find... Jamesian suggestions persuasive swing
> back and forth between trying to reduce truth to justification and propounding
> some form of minimalism about truth. In reductionist moods we have offered
> such definitions as 'warranted assertability'.... But such definitions always fall
> victim, sooner or later, to the argument that a given belief might meet any
> specifiable conditions, but still not be true. Faced with this... we pragmatists have
> often fallen back on minimalism, and have suggested that Tarski's breezy
> disquotationalism may exhaust the topic of truth.[16]

Although Rorty closely relates truth and justification he avoids defining the

former in terms of the latter. Rorty is not providing a raw substitution but applying the

pragmatic razor. Debating the truth of a sentence or wondering whether it is adequately

justified amounts to (much) the same thing; neither option informs my decision better

than the other:

> If I have concrete, specific, doubts about whether one of my beliefs is true, I can
> only resolve those doubts by asking if it is adequately justified – by finding and
> assessing additional reasons pro and con. I cannot bypass justification and
> confine my attention to truth.[17]

There is no independent test to measure the truth of a sentence apart from our procedures

of justification. The truth-justification distinction remains negative, it offers no definition

but "an informal elucidation of the notion."[18]

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[16] Richard Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Enquiry? Davidson versus Wright," in *The Philosophical Quarterly, no. 45, July 1995*, p. 282.

[17] Rorty, "Epistemology and the Philosophy of Language," p. 281.

[18] Hilary Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspectives," in Reason, Truth and History (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 56.

The fall of representation, Rorty argues, relieves philosophers from the obligation of going beyond the community in seeking truth. All justifications are local and temporary. The cautionary use of truth reminds us that justification is relative to a system of belief. Justification is always presented in relation to a historically and culturally specific audience;

> the gap between justification and truth emerges when we find that even when we have satisfactorily justified a certain belief or sentence to the currently available audience, there can always be newer and more imaginative audiences to whom we still have to justify it.[19]

No justification is permanent or universal; there is no ideal audience to which justification would mean achieving the 'truth'. The rightness or wrongness of what we say, that is, what comments are warranted and unwarranted, is only for a specific time and a local place - truth as determined by an ethnocentric intra-theoretic standard.

We have objectivity for *us* - objectivity humanly speaking. Antirepresentationalism, Rorty argues, has freed us from desiring metaphysical 'objectivity' – the need to seek objective knowledge of a world that is so independent of us as to be indifferent to our descriptions and beliefs. As Hilary Putnam states:

> it can be objective that an interpretation or an explanation is the correct one, given the context and the interests which are relevant in the context. Something can be interest relative *and* objective humanly speaking... [we] can recognize that there is a fact of the matter in interpretation without making that fact of the matter unique or context independent.[20]

Warrant is usually determined objectively but this means only that it is justified according to the contingent social standards - it is usually an 'objective' matter as to

[19] Akeel Bilgrami, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Rorty and Davidson on Truth," in Rorty and His Critics, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), p. 245.

[20] Hilary Putnam, "Is There a Fact of the Matter about Fiction?" in Realism with a Human Face (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 120.

"whether or not S is warranted in asserting p as to whether or not she is over five feet tall."[21] The 'fact of the matter' is no more than "our ability to figure out whether S is in a good position, given the interests and values of herself and her peers, to assert p."[22] Warrant or justification is, for Rorty, sociological not epistemological.

Rorty offers the humanly tainted *glossable* truth and tries to turn our attention to a "homely and shopworn sense of 'true' which Tarski and Davidson are attending to,"[23] that is, a notion of truth connected with our practices, culture and form of life. Being openly and freely determined, Rorty's ethnocentric version of truth is something that we can "defend against all comers."[24]

2.2 Disquotation, Meaning and Semantic Truth

Rorty denies both the reality of a nonepistemic world and the possibility of constructing an objective relation to it (truth); but Davidson sees different consequences of antirepresentationalism for realism. Davidson's rejection of scheme-content dualism does not involve the rejection of objectivity and he takes issue when conceptual scheme theorists make truth 'immanent' and antirealists make truth innocuous. For Davidson, truth cannot be reduced to an intratheoretical notion for

> it is not easy to see how the same sentence (without indexical elements)... can be true for one person and not for another, or for a given person at one time and not at another... it is hard to think in what language this position can be coherently, much less persuasively, expressed;[25]

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[21] Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," p. 449.
[22] Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," p. 450.
[23] Rorty, "Epistemology and the Philosophy of Language," p. 308.
[24] Rorty, "Epistemology and the Philosophy of Language," p. 308.
[25] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 306.

nor can we do without it - "[t]ruth is one of the clearest and most basic concepts we have,

so it is fruitless to dream of eliminating it."[26] Davidson sees no reason why we should

assume that the realist's radically non-epistemic or the antirealist's radically epistemic

notions of truth "are the only ways to give substance to a theory of truth or meaning."[27] In

reestablishing objectivity Davidson has to provide an argument that language users

generally get things right, that is, that belief is essentially veridical within the ubiquity of

language; "[w]hat is needed to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more

or less) coherent set of beliefs has a reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the

main."[28]

Disquotation utilizes satisfaction, satisfaction's relations explain the "property of

being true... nontrivially, in terms of a relation between language and something else."[29]

Davidson also notes that

> Tarski's satisfiers are infinite sequences which pair the variables of a language
> with the entities in its ontology... but it turns out in the end that a closed sentence
> is true if and only if it is satisfied by some sequence. This may suggest that we
> have here the makings of a correspondence theory.[30]

Yet, in satisfaction there is *no correspondence* because functions do not fulfill the role of

facts. Sentential functions, according to Davidson, arbitrarily assign entities to variables

and variables by their very definition "refer to no particular individual."[31] There is no

fact, only the function satisfying the n place predicates;

> Thus 'Dolores loves Dagmar' would be satisfied by Dolores and Dagmar (in that
> order), provided Dolores loved Dagmar. I suppose Dolores and Dagmar (in that
> order) is not a fact either – the fact that 'Dolores loves Dagmar' should somehow
> include the loving. This 'somehow' has always been the nemesis of theories of

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[26] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 314.
[27] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 309.
[28] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 126.
[29] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 48.
[30] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 69.
[31] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 48.

truth based on facts. ... So the present point is not that '*s* is satisfied by all sentential functions' means exactly what we thought '*s* corresponds to the facts' meant, only that the two phrases have this in common: both intend to express a relation between language and the world, and both are equivalent to '*s* is true' when s is a (closed) sentence.[32]

Unlike correspondence theory, in satisfaction each open sentence gets closed uniquely, is satisfied or is true because "different assignments of entities to variables satisfy different open sentences."[33] This means that truth is

> ...reached... by different routes for different reasons. All true sentences end up in the same place, but there are different stories about how they got there: a semantic theory of truth tells the story for a particular sentence by running through the steps of the recursive account of satisfaction appropriate to the sentence.[34]

The particular route to truth of an individual sentence can never be checked off against the world; the best we can manage is to check it off against the axioms from which it has been recursively generated. What satisfaction boils down to, then, is a relationship between language (sentential functions) and reality (objects) that provides unique routes for particular true sentences and is relative to language L. This is an unassuming correspondence in which we no longer compare truth-bearing linguistic vehicles with truth-making nonlinguistic entities.

Davidson argues that satisfaction stories are not to be taken as a comprehensive account of truth; "the fact that satisfaction... can be given an explicit definition... should not lead us into thinking a general concept has been captured."[35] At best, satisfaction only explains truth relations *within* a theory.

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[32] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 48.
[33] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 48.
[34] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 49.
[35] Donald Davidson, "Reality without Reference," in <u>Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 217.

Davidson aims to give a holistic account of the semantic relations between meaning, belief and truth that is fully causally relational and without reference to the uninterpreted content associated with conceptual schemes or realism's radically non-epistemic model of correspondence. Sentences are close to meaning because they are truth-bearers; but, "sentences are not, as Quine made clear, *independently* meaningful in a sense richer than that of being carriers of truth and falsehood. Sentences are meaningful only embedded in larger structure, a language."[36] Davidson's holistic theory must "be able to specify... what every sentence means... our theory should equip us to say, for an arbitrary sentence, what the speaker of the language means by the sentence."[37] As we shall see, this requirement demands that an adequate semantic theory has to be finitely and semantically recursive.

A semantic theory has to show how sentences of a language L are finitely recursive in order to explain how a language is learnable. Given a finite number of semantic primitives and the combinatorial devices inherent in the logic of grammar we are able to produce an infinite number of sentences. But this kind of recursion is insufficient to account for meaning in the face of a holism drawn as wide as Davidson's. Davidson sees his program, following Tarski's, as solving the central test of semantics - "to give a semantic interpretation (the meaning) of every sentence in the language."[38] Accordingly, a Tarskian definition via recursive satisfaction "provides an effective method for determining what every sentence means (i.e., gives the condition under which

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[36] Ramberg, "Reference," p. 34.
[37] Donald Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 9.
[38] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 22.

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it is true)"[39] - it provides semantic recursion. A truth-functional account meets all the requirements for a meaning theory:

> Nothing stands in the way of putting what I am calling a theory of meaning into the form of an explicit definition of a predicate 'is T'... The condition we have placed on satisfactory theories of meaning is in essence Tarski's Convention T that tests the adequacy of a formal semantic definition of truth.[40]

As Convention T gives the truth condition of every sentence for the foreign tongue "(relative to a sentence in the metalanguage), it determines the meaning of every word and sentence. This would seem to justify the title Theory of Meaning."[41]

Davidson asserts that a test of the meaning of a sentence in L would characterize, for every sentence s of L, an equivalent sentence p; in English: 's means p'. What can give the meaning of s? Translating homophonically (from within our own language) the only candidate is s itself and its finite recursion. But we should, Davidson argues, drop 'meaning' and opt for an extensional explanation - "giving p a sentential connective and s its own truth predicate".[42] The result is the T sentence "(T) s is T if and only if p."[43] On the left hand side of the T-sentence is the sentence 's' of the object language and on the right hand side is the biconditional 'is true if, and only if' and the sentence 'p' which states the truth condition - both in the metalanguage. This definition works because it gives

> the necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To know the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence – any sentence – to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language.[44]

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[39] Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," p. 8.
[40] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 23.
[41] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 24.
[42] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 23.
[43] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 23.
[44] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 24.

Determining the truth-conditions of a speaker's sentences will produce a theory of truth that will allow us to understand the meaning of their utterances; "in point of meaning... a word may be said to be determined to whatever extent the truth or falsehood of its contexts are determined."[45] Where Tarski studied formal languages Davidson adapts truth theory to deal with natural languages and the empirical context of interpretation. In constructing a truth theory for a foreign language we are interpreters; we come to deal with two sentences, that is, the sentence s of the foreign tongue L to be interpreted and the fairly equivalent sentence p in the translator's native language. Tarski's theory makes it possible to construct a T-sentence for every true sentence 's' of the foreign language - in turn producing a truth theory for L. When given a sentence 's' in, say German, we can generate the T-sentence "[t]he German sentence 'Schnee ist weiss' is true if and only if snow is white."[46] As the T-sentence now expands over two sentences from two different languages interpretation gives us an extended disquotation. Because T-sentences allow the interpreter to identify the truth conditions of a sentence s of the object language and provide an interpretation in the metalanguage, that is, sentence p, the interpreter, for all intents and purposes, knows the meaning of the sentence s. Davidson calls the logic of Tarskian truth theories the deep grammar[47] or structure of meaning. Tarski's truth theory allows Davidson to see an essential semantic relation between truth and meaning without appeal to epistemic intermediaries or 'content' type evidence.

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[45] W.V.O. Quine, "Truth by Convention," in Ways of Paradox (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 82.
[46] Ian Hacking, "Donald Davidson's Truth," in Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 132.
[47] Donald Davidson, "Semantics for Natural Languages," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 61-63.

Davidson's adaptation of Tarski's T-sentences to natural language incorporates

indexical statements, i.e., sentences whose truth is dependent upon a speaker and a time.

Davidson considers it obvious that sentences are not the vehicles of truth but, instead of

rejecting a connection between truth and sentences, he asks us to consider "the time the

sentence is uttered, and its utterer."[48] Thus considered 'truth' becomes a three place

predicate; "[w]e could take truth to be a property, not of sentences, but of utterances, or

speech acts, or order triples of sentences, times and persons; but it is simplest just to view

truth as a relation between a sentence, a person and a time."[49] Davidson's Tarskian style

truth theory incorporates the indexical in the form: '(T) The sentence s of L is true for

speaker u at time t if, and only if, p'. When T-sentences are given body through

satisfaction we get examples like "'I am tired' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if

and only if p is tired at t'. 'That book is stolen' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if

and only if the book demonstrated by p at t is stolen prior to t."[50] Davidson's adjustment

relates language with "the occasions of truth"[51] so as to provide a means to build a theory

of truth for a natural language.

Davidson's indexical sentences and Quine's observation/occasion sentences have

parallel roles in constructing translation manuals and theories of interpretation,

respectively. Indexical based sentences (just like in ostensive learning) "constitute the

most direct link between language and the recurrent macroscopic objects of human

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[48] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 43.
[49] Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," in <u>Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 34.
[50] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 34.
[51] Davidson, "True to the Facts," p. 44.

interest and attention,"[52] and they designate the literal meaning of utterances. An empirically based theory of truth must attend to such uses.

Davidson argues that the construction of Tarskian style truth-theory demonstrates, in the context of actual empirical interpretation, that truth is a central concept in understanding a foreign speaker's linguistic behavior. Since T-sentences tell us under what conditions an utterance is true "a theory of truth is a theory for describing, explaining, understanding, and predicting a basic aspect of verbal behavior,"[53] that is, meaning. Because of this centrality, Davidson holds 'truth' to be a crucial and important explanatory concept; semantic

> connections... make truth the key to how the mind apprehends the world. Rorty doesn't mind much my saying that truth is one concept among a number of other related concepts which we use in describing, explaining, and predicting human behavior. But why, he asks, say truth is any more important than such concepts as intention, belief, desire, and so on? Importance is a hard thing to argue about. *All* these concepts (and more) are essential to thought, and cannot be reduced to anything simpler or more fundamental. Why be niggardly in awarding prizes; I'm happy to hand out the golden apples all round.[54]

Antirealists argue that 'truth-in-L' can never approach the level of objectivity realism requires because such disquotable characterizations always remain inside the ethnocentric limit. The disquotational use of truth takes the truth predicate to be as repetitively shallow as "to say metalinguistic things of the form 'S' is true iff -----,"[55] where the '-----' is filled in by the self same sentence S originally on the left side of the biconditional. We disquote by constructing a T-sentence and dropping what was exterior to the quotations on the left side of the biconditional and moving it over to the right side;

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[52] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 35.
[53] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 313.
[54] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 73.
[55] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 128.

thus, 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. For a sentence to be true is for it to merely

> be disquotable - is for it to be correctly usable to make a claim just because ...,
> where in the gap we insert, not quoted but used, the sentence that figures on the
> right hand side of the T-sentence provided for the sentence in question by a good
> Tarskian theory for its language (the sentence itself, in the case in which we can
> exploit the unextended idea of disquotation).[56]

The disquotational use denies that truth is a substantive property and sees it as "just another way of asserting the sentence."[57] It negates any substantial language to world connection while reaffirming the conventional (glossable) notion of truth - it is used "just to reaffirm the platitudes that all men are mortal and that sugar is soluble."[58]

According to Rorty, the totality of these disquotable T-sentences produces "an infinite axiomatization of the concept of truth... while exhaust[ing] the content of the concept."[59] If we wonder about 'truth' in general all we can do is, using Tarski, define 'true-in-L' - define it *within* the theory. Using T-sentences we never approach any explanation *of* the truth theory; we never capture the intuitive content of the notion of truth. Disquotation conforms to Rorty's negative attitude towards truth as no significant role is given to it nor is it positively defined. For Rorty,

> [w]e understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world
> when we understand their causal relations with the world; our knowledge of how
> to apply terms such as 'about' and 'true of' fallout from a naturalistic account of
> linguistic behavior.[60]

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[56] John McDowell, "Toward Rehabilitating Objectivity," in Rorty and His Critics, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), p. 116.
[57] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," p. 331.
[58] Hilary Putnam, "Does the Disquotational Theory of Truth Solve All Philosophical Problems?" in Words and Life (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 265.
[59] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 68.
[60] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 128.

When the linguist uses T-sentences and satisfaction to construct a truth theory for a foreign tongue, he produces, according to Rorty, trivial accounts of the application of truth predicates for language L; since these accounts are always couched in our metalanguage his "translation-cum-ethnographic-report... [shows that] there is nothing more for us to know *about our relation to reality* than we already know."[61] Davidson's turn to semantics within the new causal picture of language demystifies the language to world connection by

> saying that if we have causal relations... holding between the World and the Self, as well as relations of justification ('being a reason for') internal to the self's network of beliefs and desires, we do not need any further relations to explain how the Self gets in touch with the World...[62]

In disquotation the relation between language and reality for L neither supports objectivity nor realism.

Davidson denies that Tarskian truth theories demonstrate a fully trivial limit to truth. T-sentences, accordingly, show what language can express. Tarskian truth-theory seeks the totality of sentences which "exhausts the extension of the truth predicate for a particular language... and each such sentence does tell us exactly under what conditions the quoted sentence is true"[63] in L. Indeed, Rorty allows that Tarskian truth-theory can define the application of the truth predicate for a given language; such a definition may be "the only way, to exhibit a natural language as a learnable, recursive structure, and thus give a systematic theory of meaning for a language."[64] The pragmatist denies that

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[61] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 135.
[62] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," p. 120.
[63] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 69.
[64] Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. xxvi.

such a truth theory tells us something substantial about the relations between the sentences of the metalanguage and the world.

Disquotation is used to deny the distinction between sentences with truth conditions (a realist notion) and sentences with assertability conditions, viewing the former as empty. Attributing objectivity to Tarskian truth theory is an attempt to make up for "what Tarski failed to do... to show us how to detect in nature the pattern his truth-theories for specific languages exhibit."[65] Tarski showed "in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make, whether in language or in thought. What we need to do now is to say how to identify the presence of such a pattern or structure in the behavior of people"[66] for successful interpretation. Rorty argues that a Tarskian theory which tracks the pattern of truth only determines the truth-conditions for sentences relative to the way we speak - it produces a theory of our complex behavior. We have no need to define general patterns of linguistic behavior because "[t]he pattern truth makes is, in fact, indistinguishable from that pattern that justification to us makes."[67]

Recognition of disquotation, Rorty argues, is the last step in dissolving the traditional problematic about truth; it helps us see that "all the classical problems of philosophy, at least from the time of Descartes, are 'optional'... [T]he general name of the problem of 'representation' is precisely the problem of the nature of truth."[68] From the antirealist perspective disquotation is a wonderful tool because

> it brings with it no large claims about the 'representational' nature of thought and language, and therefore no claims to how truth is a form of 'correspondence' to the

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[65] Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Enquiry? Davidson versus Wright," p. 287
[66] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 295.
[67] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 287.
[68] Hilary Putnam, "On Truth," in <u>Words and Life</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 316.

world. The role of truth is justified only in feeding into *our* grasp of a subject's behavior....[69]

Accordingly, Tarskian truth theory does not promote realism.

Is Davidson's use of Tarskian truth-theories merely disquotational? Davidson avidly denies such: "I am not tempted to refer to Tarski's truth definitions as 'disquotational'."[70] Davidson objects to disquotation's separation of truth and meaning; if Tarskian truth-theories are taken to be tools that simply erase the truth predicate, then the meaning of one's sentences can only be calibrated ethnocentrically. Instead of truth conditions to account for the meaning of an utterance we fall back on conventionalist theories that define meaning in terms of use. But we have seen that a disquotational approach to Tarski falls short on the semantic relation between truth and meaning when we "interpret his formal systems as empirical theories about languages."[71] The semantic relationship demonstrates that "Tarski's work [taken disquotationally] is largely unrelated to the concept of truth as we commonly understand it, so that, if we want to study the semantics of interpreted languages... we must take another tack."[72]

The extended and unextended senses of disquotation are difficult to reconcile. Disquotation works properly only in the case where the metalanguage has absorbed the object language and breaks down in the empirical context of interpretation. Once disquotation is extended "[o]ne cannot find an English equivalent of the English sentence "'Schnee ist weiss' is true (in German)" simply by removing the quotation marks from 'Schnee ist weiss'."[73] This indicates that Tarski's truth theories are not disquotational for

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[69] Bilgrami, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?: Rorty and Davidson on Truth," p. 244.
[70] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 283.
[71] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 294.
[72] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 294.
[73] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 285.

they "do not depend on stripping the quotation marks from individual sentences in order to eliminate truth predicates. Still less do they depend on using the actual sentences said to be true to effect the elimination."[74]

Davidson argues that disquotation does not give the complete content of the concept of truth; such content escapes the ethnocentric limit because "neither object language nor metalanguage can contain its own truth predicate."[75] If we look for the truth conditions of a truth-predicated sentence we are no longer using the predicate in the disquotational mode. In homophonic translation

> [w]hen I say that the sentence 'Snow is White' is true, I am accepting my own language, or, in a Tarskian reconstruction, the part of it I take as the metalanguage, as a given... I am taking 'Snow is white' in the metalanguage to be a translation of 'Snow is white' in the object language (I am taking 'snow is white' at face value). This enables me to accept 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. But how can I ever decide that snow is white?[76]

'True in L' does not tell us why such a predicate is (actually) true; nevertheless, Davidson argues, non-disquotational truth is something we know implicitly when we understand that "''snow is white' is true' if and only if snow is white' is correct in a way that "'snow is white' is true' if and only if grass is green' is not."[77] Tarskian truth theory assumes a prior grasp of the concept of truth and then shows how it is manifested in L. Disquotation excludes the general concept when it characterizes 'true-in-L'; Tarski "failed to define a predicate of the form 's is true in L' for variable 'L'."[78] There is more to truth because

> there is no indication in Tarski's work what his various truth predicates have in common, and this must be part of the content of the concept. It is not enough to point to Convention-T as that indication, for it does not speak to the question of how we know that a theory of truth for a language is correct. The concept of truth

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[74] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 285.
[75] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 69.
[76] Putnam, "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," p. 339.
[77] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 25.
[78] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 285.

has essential connections with the concepts of belief and meaning... It is here that we should expect to uncover what we miss in Tarski's characterizations....[79]

2.3 Radical Interpretation, Charity and Veridical Belief

Although Rorty has challenged that it is impossible to fill in the content of truth without falling into the metaphysics of the subject-object picture, Davidson takes the position of the field linguist in order to answer the question 'What is it for a sentence to be true?' In this context the question becomes "how is 'true' used by the outside observer of the language game?"[80] Interpretation is needed both in understanding one's own language from the inside (homophonically) and from the outside in trying to understand an alien tongue (heterophonicially):

> [t]he problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign: it surfaces for speakers of the same language in the form of the question, how can it be determined that the language is the same? Speakers of the same language can go on the assumption that for them the same expressions are to be interpreted in the same way... All understanding of speech involves radical interpretation. But it will help keep assumptions from going unnoticed to focus on cases where interpretation is most clearly called for: interpretation in one idiom of talk into another.[81]

Translation deals with the syntactical relation of two languages where "what is wanted is an interpretation of one (in another, of course, but that goes without saying since any theory is in some language)."[82] In the case of heterophonic translation, the translator brings to the translation more than what is required for translation's mere syntactical equivalency (Quine's model). Understanding a foreign sentence, Davidson argues,

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[79] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 295.
[80] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," p. 134.
[81] Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 126.
[82] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 129.

involves constructing a truth theory for the foreign tongue via radical *interpretation.*
Homophonic translation is to be understood in a semantically derivative fashion.

The field linguist must keep in mind that truth is a three-place predicate, that truth
theories deal with true sentential utterances and that interpretation is tied to the
observable via assent, dissent and observation/demonstrative sentences. An utterance has
the truth conditions (meaning) that the speaker intends it to have. Speakers who wish to
be understood intend to be interpreted in a certain way, and successful interpretation
requires that "the actual interpretation of the speaker's words [proceeds] along the
intended lines through the interpreter's recognition of the speaker's intention."[83] In order
to communicate we interpret a speaker as he intends to be understood, we uncover his
literal meanings. Communication does not necessarily require the same language but it
does require a fit between

> how speakers intend to be interpreted and how their interpreters understand them.
> This demand no doubt tends to encourage convergence in speech behavior among
> those who exchange words, the degree depending on factors like shared social and
> economic status, education and ethnic background, etc.[84]

The idea is that speakers who manage to establish a balance with their interpreters
between how they want to be understood and how they are understood have secured
theories of interpretation so as to convey what their sentences mean. The interpreter
travels in a circle because meaning is

> dependent upon the empirical confirmation... which interrelates literal meanings
> and propositional attitudes in the context of an ongoing construction of the
> complete web of sentences which constitute the language... [Via the interpretive
> method,] individualized reference becomes irrelevant to the holistic context of
> language behavior.[85]

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[83] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 311.
[84] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 311.
[85] A.C. Genova, "The Very Idea of Massive Truth," in The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Lewis
Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 169.

In developing T-sentences the field linguist tries on different interpretations until he strikes equilibrium and is able to craft a passing theory. It is through these passing theories that the linguist holistically establishes an interpretation and determines the reference of individual terms.

The field linguist is oriented initially to the observable; "the key observables are acts of assent and dissent, as caused by events within the gambit of the speaker."[86] Speech acts provide a way to account for how the "linguistic is aligned with non-linguistic behavior in the course of the native's interaction with his environment."[87] The interpreter has to "look for the best way to fit our logic, to the extent required to get a theory satisfying Convention T, on to the new language... treating this much logic as a grid to be fitted onto the language in one fell swoop."[88] Basically, we apply the rules and conventions of our language to the foreign tongue so as to begin to develop a means of comparison. We work, at this level, with "classes of sentences always held true or always held false by almost everyone almost all of the time (potential logical truths) and patterns of inference."[89] At this point, we are trying to identify sentences with consistent truth-values. The interpreter then attempts to identify the truth conditions of indexical sentences, that is, those sentences whose truth-value changes in relation to changes in the environment. At this stage we are still trying to pin down the applicability of the truth predicate for *L*; these two steps limit the number of possible interpretations. Finally, the interpreter attempts to identify sentences whose truth-value is debatable, "not depend[ent]

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[86] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 318.
[87] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," p. 133.
[88] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 136.
[89] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 136.

systematically upon changes in the environment."[90] Such sentences are generally more theoretical than practical and are not members of what we might call our 'core beliefs'.

Alone, these steps are not sufficient to constitute an act of interpretation. The interpreter must also practice charity; he "approaches the data armed with the regulative principle that most of the native's rules are the same as ours, which is to say that most of them are true."[91] Davidson borrows the notion of charity from Quine; charity reveals the semantic structure necessary for communication:

> correct interpretation of an agent by another cannot intelligibly admit certain kinds and degrees of difference between interpreter and interpreted with respect to belief. As a result, an interpreter is justified in making certain assumptions about the beliefs of an agent before an interpretation begins.[92]

Charity is the key to radical translation; it is "a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it."[93] Charity maximizes agreement and advances on two fronts by way of semantic charity and epistemic charity.

Semantic charity (or the 'Principle of Coherence') involves two steps. Charity has at its base the idea that assent reflects logic - "an interpreter cannot accept great or obvious deviations from his own standards of rationality without destroying the foundation of intelligibility on which all interpretation rests."[94] We cannot understand highly irrational speakers; thus, as a condition of interpretation, a "rational pattern... must... be shared by all rational creatures."[95] Interpreter and interpretee need to agree to more than logic. In order to interpret the meaning of another's utterances we must assume

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[90] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 136.
[91] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," p. 133.
[92] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 319.
[93] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 197.
[94] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 320.
[95] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 320.

that the speaker holds her beliefs to be true. Only true beliefs provide a measure for

assent; a "speaker who wishes his words to be understood cannot systematically deceive

his would-be interpreters about when he assents to sentences - that is, holds them true."[96]

Semantic charity is not enough. The interpreter's goal is to understand what the

speaker means by a sentence and we know that this involves a measure of what she

believes; "if we merely know that someone holds a certain sentence to be true, we know

neither what he means by the sentence nor what belief his holding true represents."[97] The

interpreter's problem is a 'vector of two forces':

> what he is assumed to know - the causes of assents to sentences of a speaker -
> is... the product of two things that he is assumed not to know, meaning and belief.
> If he knew the meanings he would know the beliefs, and if he knew the beliefs
> expressed by sentences assented to, he would know the meanings. But how can he
> learn both at once, since each depends on the other?[98]

The theory of interpretation has to allow the interpreter to develop a theory of meaning

and a theory of belief at the same time - a method that allows us to determine one while

cornering the other. The solution is found in "the attitude of holding a sentence to be

true... [for it] relates belief and interpretation in a fundamental way."[99] 'Holding a belief

to be true' in the context of an interpretive strategy provides the interpreter with a means

to "make a correct attribution of belief."[100] The interpreter has to apply 'epistemic charity'

(or the 'Principle of Correspondence') to semantic agreement while respecting the

ubiquity of language; given the latter, the only "unimpeachable... method available to the

interpreter automatically puts the speaker's belief in accord with the standards... of the

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[96] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 129.
[97] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 196.
[98] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 129.
[99] Davidson, "Thought and Talk," p. 162.
[100] Davidson, "Thought and Talk," p. 162.

interpreter, and hence credits the speaker with the plain truths."[101] Epistemic charity

directs the interpreter to translate via "his own standards of truth into the pattern of truth

held true by the speaker."[102] We assume that the speaker not only holds true beliefs but

also that those beliefs are in fact true, as we judge them. This makes the interpreter's and

the speaker's beliefs equivalent and provides a "common ground on which to judge either

conformity or difference"[103] of belief.

Semantic and epistemic charity combine to form Davidson's maximizing

agreement thesis; communication is possible only in as far as speakers are engaged in a

manner that optimizes agreement. Maximized agreement gives us a measure for the

viability of a subject for interpretation; if we cannot attribute logic or rationality to

speakers, nor take them to be holding true beliefs, nor consider them as having a "set of

beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that

creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything."[104]

We bring to the scene of an interpretation a prior truth theory and begin to

construct a passing truth theory;

> For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared to interpret an
> utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he does interpret the
> utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he believes the interpreter's
> prior theory to be, while his passing theory is the theory he intends the interpreter
> to use.[105]

Prior theories are complex theories of human linguistic behavior, involving the meanings,

desires and behaviors expected by the interpreter to be expressed by the interpretee. In

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[101] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 130.
[102] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 129.
[103] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 129.
[104] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 137.
[105] Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," in Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Ernest Lepore (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 442.

the homophonic setting we often already know the truth conditions of another's utterances (and hence the meaning of those utterances), yet communication in our own language is not always so easy and difficulties interpreting may arise because we may make mistakes or use words differently. If a speaker makes a mistake we can opt for reinterpreting these utterances so as to foster communication instead of ending it; we may, e.g., think the speaker is using a word in a novel way. We reinterpret in order to "preserve a reasonable theory of belief"[106] and, in doing so, we blaze a passing theory.

> Charity makes meaningful agreement and disagreement possible; disagreement depends entirely on a foundation - some foundation - in agreement. The agreement may take the form of a widespread sharing of sentences held true by speakers of 'the same language', or agreement in the large mediated by a theory of truth contrived by an interpreter.[107]

Too much error blurs the focus of disagreement in conversation. Specific error, Davidson argues, gives belief its point; "the more sentences we conspire to accept or reject (whether or not through a medium of interpretation), the better we understand the rest, whether or not we agree about them."[108] We have no understanding of how we could communicate with a speaker who was mostly wrong about what there is, so we must 'count him true in most matters'; "it must generally be the case that a sentence is true when a speaker holds it to be true."[109]

Charity provides the ground for the massive truthfulness of belief. The veridical nature of belief lies in the conditions of interpretation that make another's speech intelligible; "[w]hat makes interpretation possible, then, is that we can dismiss a priori the

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[106] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme, " p. 196.
[107] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 196.
[108] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 137.
[109] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," p. 169.

chance of massive error."[110] With this argument for the objectivity of truth, Davidson can

dismiss the skeptic. The investigation into the conditions of communication has revealed

two kinds of truth: one homely and shopworn 'true-in-L', the other objective or, as

Davidson refers to it, "absolutely basic."[111] Absolute truth is presupposed by

communication and interpretation; absolute truth is held constant between languages and

cannot be relativized to a language.[112] Absolute truth is, according to Davidson, the most

basic concept we have and remains indefinable. Indefinability is

> what we should expect. For the most part, the concepts philosophers single out for
> attention, like truth, knowledge, belief... are the most elementary concepts we
> have, concepts without which (I am inclined to say) we would have no concepts at
> all. Why then should we expect to be able to reduce these concepts to other
> concepts that are simpler, clearer, and more basic? We should accept the fact that
> what makes these concepts so important must also foreclose on the possibility of
> finding a foundation for them which reaches deeper into the bedrock.[113]

Absolute truth, not reference, is basic to an empirical theory of language. Within a truth-

theory we characterize truth for another language by developing T-sentences that state the

truth conditions for particular sentences. Additionally, we explain these particular

sentences' relation to reality via the concept of satisfaction, which assists us in

understanding as true the utterances of the foreign speaker in language L but "assigns no

empirical content directly to relations between names or predicates and objects. These

relations are given content indirectly when the T-sentences are."[114] When it comes to

interpreting the theory as a whole, that is, explaining why the truth-theory we have

developed for another language holds, we can only give it empirical application via

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[110] Davidson, "Radical Interpretation," pp. 168-169.
[111] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 285.
[112] Bjorn Ramberg, "Radical Interpretation (1): The Principle of Charity," in Donald Davidson's
Philosophy of Language (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 76.
[113] Donald Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," in *The Journal of Philosophy, vol. XCI11, no.
6, June 1996*, p. 264.
[114] Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," p. 223.

nonlinguistic evidence. The evidence for a theory of truth for a language as a whole "cannot be described in terms that relate it in advance to any particular language, and this suggest that the concept to which we appeal has a generality that the theory cannot hope to explain."[115]

Is a priori massive truth enough to establish the veridical nature of belief? Why are these shared beliefs, in fact, true of the world? Davidson appears to be arguing that 'agreement establishes truth' but all interpretation can show is agreement between speakers and sentences held true. This ensures intersubjective agreement but it is not enough to confirm the claim that beliefs *are*, in fact, veridical. Davidson's argument, in staying with coherence and a priori evidence, appears to turn on a "purely conceptual, self evident connection between the concepts and truth"[116] and not on a language to world relation - a connection reminiscent of a Kantian-type transcendental deduction. Is Davidson substituting agreement for objectivity? How does coherence yield correspondence?

Belief is veridical, Davidson argues, because the world determines the contents of belief; the world "must already be there... as a condition for counting speech as meaningful, as more than a stream of noise."[117] What we say of the world, the utterances revealing the beliefs we hold, is largely correct in relation to the external world that causes beliefs to be what they are. Quine maintained a proximal theory relating the meaning of utterances to the world via observation sentences' 'stimulus meaning' -

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[115] Davidson, "Reality without Reference," p. 223.
[116] Genova, "The Very Idea of Massive Truth," p. 174.
[117] Frank Farrell, "Davidson and the Disenchantment of Language," in Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 78.

meaning was tied to the internal causal relations of the senses. Davidson's argues to the

contrary that

> the details of the mechanisms that constitute the causal chains from speaker to
> speaker, and spoken-of object to speaker and language learner, cannot matter to
> meaning and reference. The grasp of meanings is determined only by the terminal
> elements in the conditioning process and is tested only by the end product: use of
> words geared to appropriate objects and situations. ...[T]wo speakers who mean
> 'the same thing' by an expression need have no more in common than their
> dispositions to appropriate verbal behavior; the neural networks may be very
> different...The causal connection between thought and objects and events in the
> world could have been established in entirely different ways without making any
> difference to the contents or veridicality of belief.[118]

Davidson prefers Quine's less developed distal theory. The distal theory holds that the

contents of belief are correctly about that which caused them - 'the terminal elements',

that is, events and objects distant or 'out there' separate from the trappings of our sensory

systems. The distal theory drops the notion of an epistemological step "from central

theoretical importance to meaning and knowledge."[119] It is the truth-conditions or "causes

external to the speaker [that] matter directly to meaning,"[120] especially the fixed points

between all speakers. The shared stimulus is the "world. The shared stimulus is, of

course, distal. The unshareable stimulations of the sense organs are not fixed points."[121]

The distal theory emphasizes that which is salient between speakers and interpreters - the

similarity of their linguistic responses (assent behavior) in relation to objects in their

shared environment. As Davidson states, the evidence for "'That is snow' is based on the

causal connection between a speaker's assent to the sentence and the demonstrative

presentation of snow."[122] Meaning requires a causal picture, semantics depends on

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[118] Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," pp. 301-303.
[119] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 76.
[120] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 77.
[121] Davidson, "Meaning, Truth and Evidence," p. 76.
[122] Donald Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," in Thought and Language, ed. J. M. Preston
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 26, note 11.

external circumstances; "[c]ommunication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects."[123] The causal picture acts as a guide for the interpreter, who works in the context of charity such that it is impossible to identify meaning apart from beliefs and the causes of beliefs. When we look for a 'true belief' in others we are recognizing something we all share as language users.

Truth in our language, according to Davidson, is the same as it is in others; truth is objective as a result of the causal/semantic connections between meaning, belief and truth. Accordingly, we can call Davidson's position a 'semantic realism'. It posits a transcendental relation between the linguistic and nonlinguistic realms, a relation that escapes proper characterization in any particular language because it can only be articulated in language as 'true-in-L'. Since an interpreter practicing charity imposes standards of truth, this position suggests an antirealist characterization of truth but the interpreter only imposes standards in light of the universal applicability of truth to any language. Truth is objective because belief is veridical; true beliefs require only a causal relation between "what the words as spoken mean, and how the world is arranged."[124] Because speakers share this common world they can have a basis on which to agree and disagree. Truth does escape limits of the disquotation; Davidson's philosophy of language salvages a notion of truth that is nontrivial and applies to languages generally. In explicating truth's role as an intersubjective standard Davidson formulates how we can understand speakers as communicating agents in a shared environment - he produces a model that has no problematic distinction between the linguistic and the empirical.

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[123] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 132.
[124] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 122.

Davidson, unlike Rorty, is not eager to give up on a substantial, albeit oblique or 'mild'[125], relation between language and world.

2.4 Externalism, Triangulation and Thought

The causal-semantic model correlates to the naturalized view of language learning; together, these models further outline the essential role truth plays in language.[126] A comprehensive account of meaning (and therefore of truth) "can best be made by appealing to obvious facts about language learning and to facts about how we interpret words and languages with which we are unfamiliar."[127]

We are unable to share the same physical space; therefore "each of us has his own perspective on it… [but] the relations among our positions are intelligible because we locate each person in a single, common world."[128] A triangle is formed between ourselves, others and the world. In its basic form the triangle requires at least two organisms whose reactions are causally connected to their environment and correlated with each other. Triangulation occurs in natural populations of organisms and has a physiological-sociological basis; it is 'wired in' so to speak, and, "[o]ne sees this in its simplest form in a school of fish, where each fish reacts almost instantaneously to the motions of the others."[129] Most organisms exhibit triangulated activities but not all of

[125] Don Ross, "Rainforest Realism," in Dennett's Philosophy: A Comprehensive Assessment, eds. Andrew Brook et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p. 159.
[126] Davidson more or less accepts Quine's 'ostension to mastery' account of how a person learns to speak a language and appreciates the value of the double role Quine assigns to observations sentences.
[127] Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," p. 302.
[128] Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," p. 296.
[129] Donald Davidson, "The Emergence of Thought," in Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 128.

them exhibit thought or speech. According to Davidson, "[o]ur sense of objectivity is ...another sort of triangulation."[130]

In the initial stages of language learning we cannot say that a child's simple utterance exhibits thought or speech. At first, in language learning, ostension is pure conditioning. The learning process begins merely with an association "between object or situation and sound and gesture. The value of the association is supplied by the teacher or the environment in the form of reward. In the beginning there is not a word but a sound being given a use."[131] At the start the child shows no more cognizance than an animal in training; "error has no point... for there is nothing [for the child] to be wrong about, and where error has no point, there is not a concept or thought."[132] The interaction between teacher and student creates a space for success and failure, the necessary condition for the emergence of language and 'propositional thought'.

Language is an inherently social medium of interaction and truth will have its basis in the interpersonal relationships we share; "we could not have the concept of getting things right or wrong if it were not for our interactions with other people."[133] Given our shared modes of generalization and language tutelage, the space for success or failure is opened slowly as the child moves from conditioning, to imitation and to correlation. When the child correlates its responses with another's responses it has entered the social fray. Early speakers seek repeated one-word sentences, group them together and tie these utterances to the objects in the world. Correlation allows each creature to

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[130] Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals," in Actions and Events, eds. Ernest Lepore and Brian McLaughlin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 480.
[131] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 71.
[132] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 71.
[133] Davidson, "The Emergence of Thought," p. 129.

come to "expect the external phenomena when it perceives the associated reaction of the other."[134] Social interaction accounts for how experience gives our thoughts specific content; without shared responses to mutually salient objects and events we have no measure to gauge what we or others are reacting to - "[i]t takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of thought, and thus to define its content."[135] Because content is determined in the process of triangulation, the child who eventually learns the meaning of the word 'red' learns not just something about the English language but also something about the world which English speakers (and others) inhabit.

Without language, Davidson argues, "the base line of the triangle, the line between the two agents... [cannot be] strengthened to the point where it can implement the communication of propositional contents."[136] Sentences are understood if the speaker understands the propositional contents the sentences express. Those propositional contents (or concepts) classify objects, their properties and events involving those objects. Children, Davidson states, can only come to understand the concepts used in their sentences if they can recognize the differences laid out by the concepts themselves:

> we can only say the child *thinks* something is red, or a ball, if it appreciates the distinction... [T]he child thinks something is red, or a ball only if it is in some sense aware that a mistake is possible. It is classifying things, and it may have put something in the wrong slot.[137]

Belief is possible only if one understands that belief can be correct or incorrect; "I can believe it is now raining, but this is because I know that whether or not it is raining does not depend on whether I believe it, or anyone believes it, or it is useful to believe it;

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[134] Davidson, "The Emergence of Thought," p. 129.
[135] Donald Davidson, "Three Varieties of Knowledge," in Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 212.
[136] Davidson, "The Emergence of Thought," p. 130.
[137] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 71.

it is up to nature, not to me or my society or the entire history of the human race."[138]

Behavior may indicate a change in environment "but if the anticipated danger or

opportunity fails to materialize, a place exists for the notion of a mistake."[139]

Communicating organisms must be in a position to notice error on behalf of their

communicating counterpart; if one of them can recognize error then one has "grasped the

concept of objective truth."[140] Belief is a condition of knowledge and to believe a

sentence we have to know what it is for such a sentence to be true; we require, thus, the

concept of objective truth. Anyone "who has a belief about the world - or anything else -

must grasp... what is the case independent of what he or she thinks."[141] The concept of

objective truth entails understanding that one's beliefs "may or may not jibe with

reality."[142] Truth, Davidson states, is primordial (absolutely basic): "[w]ithout a grasp of

the concept of truth, not only language, but thought itself, is impossible."[143]

Communication is the only measure for the correct use of words; only language

provides the base line for interpretation and a standard of objectivity. Only if a creature

has such a standard can we attribute to it possession of the concept of truth and think of it

as having thoughts. Triangulation is necessary as the "ultimate source of both objectivity

and communication... by relating speaker, interpreter and the world, [it] determines the

contents of thought and speech."[144] Triangulation anchors language to the world; it

"guarantees the general correctness of a limited body of belief, but the beliefs in this

category carry great weight, for they ensure that there is a world external to us that

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[138] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 72.
[139] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 27.
[140] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 27.
[141] Davidson, "Three Varieties of Knowledge," p. 209.
[142] Davidson, "The Emergence of Thought," p. 133.
[143] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 72.
[144] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 325.

contains people and a considerable number of other macroscopic objects, and that these objects exist independent of us in a shared time and space."[145]

Davidson has found a way to make explicit what disquotation could only indicate. Truth lets us know what it is for sentences in our own language to be true; truth is articulated as true-in-L but truth is also something presupposed by all language users. Truth underlies our attempts at forming theories of complex behavior used as a means to interpret the speech of others. Furthermore, the concept of truth is the prime condition of meaningful speech and gives one an understanding of what true beliefs are and what it means for a thinker to hold true beliefs; the concept provides the context for understanding how belief, thought and language interact. While truth is not a vehicle to accurate representations it can still operate as a central explanatory concept.

Davidson's analysis places much weight on truth but does very little to clarify its nature. This is unproblematic, however, as the nature of truth is not "amenable to sharp formulation in a clearer, more basic, vocabulary."[146] We cannot define truth in isolation from the other notions; it is not the case that "we can say nothing revealing about it: we can, by relating it to other concepts like belief, desire, cause, and action. Nor does the indefinability of truth imply that the concept is mysterious, ambiguous, or untrustworthy."[147] When it comes to these semantic concepts we cannot "produce correct and revealing definitions… in terms of clearer or even more fundamental concepts."[148]

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[145] Donald Davidson, "Reply to A. C. Genova," in The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 193.
[146] Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," p. 264.
[147] Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," p. 265.
[148] Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," p. 264.

2.5 Seeing Through Having A Language

The triangle, Rorty argues, requires all three sides to constitute itself; we cannot determine the contribution of one side separately from another. This is evident in interpretation where you remain holistic and engage in a circling "play back and forth between causation and inference in a way which does not permit any of the corners of a triangle to be independent of any others."[149] Triangulation, Rorty states, teaches us that

> I, the other language-users, and the rest of the universe all are what we are because the other two sides of the triangle are what they are, and there is no point in trying to break down 'are what they are' into more specific processes of projecting or reflecting. This is because there is no way of examining any of these three sides in isolation from each other, in order to see who is doing what to whom.[150]

Rorty insists that this interdependence should stop us from asking what our relationship to the rest of the universe is, to stop thinking that the world is important or matters in terms of meaningful speech. We have to stop asking realist questions like 'Whose contours, language's or the world's? Whose contours are reflecting whose?'[151]

If realism tries to figure out what *in the world* makes a true sentence true or worries about discerning the contributions of one aspect of the triangle in distinction from another, then it is a metaphysical dead end. Davidson's model of triangulation is not intended as a position from which we could discriminate the contributions of one side from the other - a position equivalent to the metaphysical realist's God's-Eye point of view.

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[149] Rorty, "Response to Donald Davidson," p. 78.
[150] Rorty, "Response to Farrell," p. 194.
[151] Frank Farrell, "Rorty and Anti-Realism," in Rorty & Pragmatism, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 192.

We can see through language to the world because, Davidson states, language is more than a learned skill; it is "or has become, a mode of perception."[152] Davidson likens language to an organ of the body; yet it is more than an organ for "it is essential to the other senses if they are to yield propositional knowledge."[153] Philosophers tend to think of speech and organs as vastly different sorts of devices - what, after all, does seeing an apple or digesting an apple have to do with talking about apples? We consider each of these acts as distinct types yet "[s]peech, like the sense organs, has a specialized location in the brain; as a result, brain damage can cause a loss of the ability to use language."[154] Language has the unique specification of being the organ of propositional perception; while other senses do not require thoughts or propositional content, if the sensor is to perceive how things are - the nature of reality - he needs to speak a language. Without epistemological intermediaries, "[p]erception, once we have propositional thought, is direct and unmediated… nothing… underpins our knowledge of the world."[155] We should not think that we see "the world through language any more than we see the world through our eyes. We don't look through our eyes but with them."[156] Language is part of our "natural equipment [for seeing what is], and not a tool we contrived for coping."[157] Language puts us in touch with the world and makes the nature of the world present; "[w]hat appears in the overall character of our linguistic system and our system of beliefs is, at least very roughly, the self-display of the world."[158]

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[152] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 22.
[153] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 22.
[154] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 19.
[155] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 22.
[156] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 18.
[157] Davidson, "Seeing Through Language," p. 20.
[158] Farrell, "Davidson and the Disenchantment of Language," p. 79.

Language, for the most part, reflects realist ontology; Davidson states that he

agrees

> with Rorty that 'we are equally in touch with reality when we describe a hunk of
> space-time in atomic, molecular, cellular, physiological, behavioral, intentional,
> political, or religious terms.' Hunks of space-time are real enough, so what ever
> we say about them, we are 'in touch with reality' even if we describe some hunks
> as witches, griffons or gods. But saying this does not eliminate differences... The
> differences do not, I hope I have made clear, touch on ontology....[159]

Ontology is reflected within satisfaction's assignment of entities to expressions;

satisfaction pairs singular terms with objects. While satisfaction explains how true

sentences are language specific, Davidson's larger semantic project requires a common

ontology of objects and events between all language users. Davidson states that "we

cannot explain how language works without invoking an ontology and assigning objects

to singular terms. There cannot in my opinion be a language that does not deal with

particular entities."[160] The nature of those particular entities that "we, as interpreters, must

take them to be is what they in fact are."[161] Davidson's philosophy of language has

"erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing the way around the

world generally."[162]

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[159] Donald Davidson, "Reply to Richard Rorty," in The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 599.
[160] Donald Davidson, "Reply to Stephen Neale," in The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p. 669.
[161] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 132.
[162] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 446.

2.6 Modest Realism

Davidson states that his position is a semantic "non-relativized, non-internal form of realism"[163] and we have seen above how his realism reconnects us with the world. It is also distinct from

> metaphysical realism. It is not internal realism because internal realism makes truth relative to a scheme, and this is an idea I do not think is intelligible. ...[M]y realism is certainly not... metaphysical realism, for *it* is characterized by being 'radically non-epistemic', which implies that all our best researched and established thoughts and theories may be false.[164]

The metaphysical realist's notion of a radically nonepistemic world independent of belief is rejected as an idea without content. The semantic character of truth is achieved through its intimate connections with meaning and belief while abjuring the possibility of determining the reference of individual terms independently of a particular language. Because a sentence can only be given a truth value *within* L the truth of such sentences defaults to dependence upon the logic of recursive satisfaction. Satisfaction delivers evidence *of* a theory of truth for L; it tells us what it is for a sentence to be true *in* L and fixes the application of the truth predicate "in a holistically confirmed empirical theory of meaning."[165] But, it is only in the empirical context of interpretation that the semantic relations between meaning, belief and truth are fully developed. It is only in the empirical context that we can have evidence *for* a theory of truth. Interpretation cannot be achieved without charity. Charity yields massive truth.

Belief is veridical but our knowledge is not absolute nor our language perfect; we

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[163] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 122.
[164] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 122. Davidson cannot be a naïve realist either; the world has to be pretty much as we say it is because veridical belief is a requirement for successful communication.
[165] Genova, "The Very Idea of Massive Truth," p. 171.

cannot, alas, draw the picturesque and pleasant conclusion that all true belief constitutes knowledge. For though all of a believer's beliefs are to some extent justified to him, some may not be justified enough, or in the right way, to constitute knowledge.[166]

We have to accept a reasonable amount of error in our beliefs and do our best in working to refine our studies, our techniques and our methods; we

> know many things, and will learn more; what we will never know for certain is which of the things we believe is true. ...the 'pursuit of truth' is an empty enterprise unless it means only that it is often worthwhile to increase our confidence in our beliefs, by collecting further evidence and checking our calculations. [167]

We have to accept that we are never going to get outside our beliefs to the metaphysical truth of the matter - we just have to get along the best way we can and find out about the world through our limited and fallible means; "[t]he best we can do is test, experiment, compare and keep an open mind. But no matter how long and well we and coming generations keep at it, we and they will be left with fallible beliefs."[168]

2.7 Conclusion

Rorty's position seeks to eliminate truth from philosophical dialogue. Davidson moves in the other direction and makes truth fundamental to the analysis of language and communication. Unlike a correspondence theory of truth that posits a gap between what is said and what is, that is, between our opinions and what those opinions are about, Davidson provides a naturalist picture of language that breaks down the linguistic-nonlinguistic dichotomy. What we say is largely caused by and is true of what is happening in our environment. This is a return to the world and a vindication of a realist

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[166] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 134.
[167] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 67.
[168] Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated," p. 67.

ontology. In giving up representation "we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[169] Epistemically beliefs are supported by nothing other than other true beliefs but nonetheless are true of the world; "[w]hat saves truth from being 'radically non-epistemic' is not that truth is epistemic but that belief, through its ties with meaning, is intrinsically veridical."[170] Davidson's position reveals itself to be a viable but modest realism, one based in semantics.

We have seen that Davidson has been able to do what Rorty said impossible: he reestablished the objectivity of truth in a manner that supports realism. In light of Davidson's modest realism we must conclude that Rorty is in error in arguing that antirepresentationalism necessitates antirealism.

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[169] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," p. 198.
[170] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," p. 136.

Chapter 3

Politics, Pain and Irony: Difficulties within Antirealism

3.1 Introduction

Having shown that Rorty is incorrect to argue that truth is obsolete and objective reality a metaphysical illusion, I want to draw out some further implications of Davidson's philosophy of language by presenting two further criticisms of Rorty's position. Given all of these difficulties, I conclude that Rorty's antirealism is not a viable alternative to realism.

3.2 Liberal Politics, Pain and 'We'

Rorty opts for the ethnocentric account because, in his view, language has lost its central purpose and has fractured into specific communities of vocabularies reflecting specific values, histories and cultures. Cut off from the representational project, the voices of the western democracies seem only to announce their presence and trumpet their form of life. Rorty's liberal community is run by a 'we' - a 'we' based within an ethnocentric language reflecting an 'American' way of life (including education, wealth, etc.).

In the liberal community that Rorty envisions, members would have an ironic point of view. They would be cured of their metaphysical desire for transcendence and would deny that any vocabulary could 'get things right'. Ironists would embrace the multiplicity of their views and the contingency of the political theatre in which such views can be freely presented while, nonetheless, continuing to believing that such views are worth having. The privileged and lucky citizens of this society would aspire to be

ironists but rarely would the uneducated achieve such a perspective - thus, the latter

would just accept their society's vocabulary as final, contingent and commonsensical and

they would speak it without asking for theological or philosophical underpinnings. The

best candidates for community leaders in this liberal society, Rorty argues, are the

'ironists', are *us* - his readers, his 'we' - "the people who are always willing to hear the

other side, to think out the implications, etc."[1] - *us* at our best. Who is Rorty's 'we'[2]:

liberal democrats, liberal intellectuals, and educated westerners.

The public rhetoric of such a society, Rorty argues, cannot be ironic - "I cannot

imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continually

dubious of their own process of socialization."[3] The youth and the uneducated's sense of

objectivity is just another way for other members of a liberal society to feel solidarity

with one another. Devoid of any unifying metaphysical goal, the politic of Rorty's

citizens is unified in difference; it is a solidarity that is essentially negative: "human

solidarity is not a matter of sharing a common truth or common goal [or common project]

but sharing a common selfish hope, the hopes that one's world... one's final vocabulary...

will not be destroyed."[4] What will bind us together in a liberal community is a mutual

respect for privacy, a sharing of what is not shared - it is a social organization whose

public rhetoric is aimed at giving everyone a chance at self-creation.

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[1] Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," p. 452.
[2] Rebecca Comay, "Interrupting the Conversation: Notes on Rorty," in Antifoundationalism and Practical Reasoning, ed. Evan Simpson (Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1987), p. 84.
[3] Richard Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 86.
[4] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 92.

Unification has as its base the recognition that we can all feel pain. Language and

"socialization... go all the way down,"[5] but underneath, Rorty argues, we share a

universal animal trait in our ability to feel pain or feel "raw feels."[6] Distinct from the

beasts we can feel a special sort of pain, socialized human beings can feel humiliation.

Humiliation, Rorty argues, is the result of one's language (one's belief system) being

redescribed and, therefore, destroyed. Ironists are particularly apt at humiliation,

humiliation comes when people are denied the ability to define themselves;

> Ironism, as I have defined it, results from awareness of the power of redescription.
> But most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their
> own terms - taken seriously just as they are and just as they talk. The ironist tells
> them that the language they speak is up for grabs... There is something
> potentially very cruel about that claim. For the best way to cause people long
> lasting pain is to humiliate them by making the things that seemed most important
> to them look futile, obsolete... The redescribing ironist, by threatening one's final
> vocabulary... suggests that one's self and one's world are powerless.
> Redescription often humiliates.[7]

Denied of the self-creative capacity of language one's 'world has been unmade'.[8]

Humiliation as the unmaking of someone's world is a notion Rorty adopts from the work

of Elaine Scarry.[9] Scarry's argument is that cruelty essentially involves the making

absent of the voice of the other speaker first by silencing and then by replacement; the

torturer

> dominates the prisoner in both physical and verbal acts, ultimate domination
> requires that the prisoner's ground become increasingly physical and the torturer's
> increasingly verbal, that the prisoner become a colossal body with no voice and
> the torturer a colossal voice (a voice composed of two voices)...[10]

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[5] Richard Rorty, "The Last Intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty," in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 185.
[6] Richard Rorty, "The Invention of the Mind," in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 24.
[7] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 90.
[8] Rorty, "The Last Intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty," p. 178.
[9] Elaine Scarry, "The Structure of Torture: The Conversion of Real Pain into the Fiction of Power," in The Body in Pain (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 27-59.
[10] Scarry, "The Structure of Torture: The Conversion of Real Pain into the Fiction of Power," p. 57.

Privately the ironist can describe anyone and anything in any terms he so wishes, but publicly the private ironist must strive to act liberally. That is, the public liberal must try to be aware of the many ways in which people can be humiliated and act in such a way as to diminish suffering. From the liberal ironist's perspective, our "common susceptibility to humiliation is the only *social* bond that is needed."[11]

In Rorty's liberal utopia, public interaction would strive to attain "an appropriate mixture of unforced agreement with tolerant disagreement (where what counts as appropriate is determined, within that sphere, by trial and error)."[12] In such a society the citizens can feel confident that 'objectivity' or 'truth' will be the outcome of open and free debate - the sort of debate that

> goes on when the press, the judiciary, the elections, and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common, and peace and wealth have made possible the leisure necessary to listen to lots of different people and think about what they say.[13]

It is not deeds, nor force, nor logic but words, persuasion and rhetoric that will determine the 'truths' in a liberal society. In light of this, the goal of achieving 'objective truth' is nothing more than an appeal to our future generations to achieve "as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of [the better] us [that is, 'We'] as far as we can."[14] Viewed in this negative manner 'truth' becomes "an ever-retreating goal, one which fades for ever and ever... It is not what commonsense would call a goal... it is not even something to which we might get closer, much less something we

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[11] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 91.
[12] Richard Rorty, "Science as Solidarity," in Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers: Volume I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 41.
[13] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 84.
[14] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers: Volume I (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 23.

might realize we had finally reached."[15] If we give up the desire for objectivity we can turn our focus from getting 'outside language' to 'amongst us' - we can drop epistemology in favor of politics.[16]

In my view, Rorty's 'we', that is, his concept of community, is exceedingly narrow. As large as his 'we' is expanded it continues to represent nothing more than the aspirations of privileged bourgeois western liberals. Returning to Davidson's theory of interpretation, I will show that people share more in common than the ability to feel pain and humiliation. Our sense of 'we' has to be much broader than the expanding sphere of liberal influence Rorty hopes North American democracies can achieve.

According to Davidson's theory of interpretation, if our interlocutor exhibits unexpected linguistic behavior we may change a prior theory to a passing theory so as to preserve a theory of belief and foster communication. Davidson uses the following example: "you see a ketch sailing by and your companion says, 'Look at that handsome yawl.'"[17] In this situation you can consider your friend mistaken in his belief - a yawl is not a ketch, maybe the friend does not know enough about watercraft so as to make the distinction. Alternatively, you may realize that the friend "does not use the word 'yawl' quite as you do, and has made no mistake at all about the position of the jigger on the passing yacht."[18] If we interpret the latter along 'passing' lines we have dropped the distinction between "what a speaker, on a given occasion, means, and what his words

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[15] Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Davidson versus Wright," p. 298.
[16] This a ideological defense of western liberal democracy; for Rorty's critical assessment see: Richard Rorty, "Post-Democracy," in *London Review of Books, vol. 26, no. 7, April 2004*, pp. 10 - 11.
[17] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of an Conceptual Scheme," p. 196.
[18] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of an Conceptual Scheme," p. 196.

mean."[19] Thus, the distinction between idiosyncratic and conventional meaning, and the authority of the latter, has been dropped.

Passing theories demonstrate that when communicating we interpret the literal meaning of words, that is, meaning is truth functional and truth is a three-place predicate (it is tied to a speaker and a time). An utterance has the truth conditions the speaker intends it to have and a theory of truth for the foreign speaker's language L proceeds by "describing the critical core of the speaker's potential and actual linguistic behavior, in effect, how the interpreter intends his utterances to be understood."[20] The speaker always uses literal meaning when trying to communicate; "if the speaker is understood he has been interpreted as he intended to be interpreted."[21] If we can understand what a person is saying even if they are using the words atypically we still understand their *first* meaning - what they intend to convey to us. Beyond what the speaker is trying to convey to us his words have no real meaning - convention has no authority over meaning. Davidson argues that philosophers who make convention the basis of language "have the matter backwards. The truth is rather that language is a condition for having conventions."[22] The erosion of convention, Davidson argues, calls into question our traditional understanding of what it is to speak a language and the very concept language itself.

If the interpreter develops a successful passing theory then he can be said to be speaking the same language as his interlocutor - even though he may be communicating without the benefit of what is considered an ordinary common language. As

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[19] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 434.
[20] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," p. 312.
[21] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 436.
[22] Donald Davidson, "Communication and Convention" in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 280.

communication can commence in this manner we cannot maintain the Wittgensteinian

idea of a language as a

> clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to
> cases.... [no] learnable common core of consistent behavior, [there is] no shared
> grammar or rules, no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of
> an arbitrary utterance.[23]

That is, we cannot understand language to be something determined solely by convention

- isolate and unique to different communities of speakers. What we call 'knowing a

language' boils down to one's ability to construct passing theories; and, the rules by which

they are constructed amount to little more than 'wit, luck and wisdom and there is no

hope of regularizing or teaching this process'.[24] With 'passing theories' we no longer

have any use for the traditional concept of language:

> We could hold that any theory on which a speaker and an interpreter converge is a
> language; but then there would be a new language for every unexpected turn in
> the conversation, and languages could not be learned and no one would want to
> master most of them.[25]

Taking Davidson's position seriously means that we have to accept that "there is no such

thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and

linguists have supposed."[26]

Davidson's destruction of the traditional notion of language carries great

implications for the notion of a speech community. Since any two speakers that can

manage communication can be said to share a language they can also be said to share

membership in the same speech community. Like languages the number of communities

are so numerous and so fading the membership seems trivial. These insights into

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[23] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 442-445.
[24] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 446.
[25] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 445.
[26] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," p. 446.

convention and community suggest that Rorty's 'we' is a exceedingly narrow group drawn along artificial boundaries. This becomes even clearer when we consider that Davidson has shown that language users share more than an ability to feel pain; in review: language gets us in touch with the world, our beliefs are reflected in a language that has to be largely objectively true and truth is a requirement of communication. And, because we have seen that truth is something we have in common with all language users, it is impossible to conclude that convention determines the boundaries of a language or a community of speakers - it appears, then, that no one's most basic linguistic practices are very far apart or really very different at all. Given our shared physiology and linguistic capabilities what previously seemed ethnocentrically bound has been opened to all speakers. Culture and history separate our linguistic communities but these are about as deep as the differences go, only here does the political arena commence. Rorty's position is found wanting in its failure to recognize that we really are a global community of speakers united through truth.

3.3 Commonsense and Irony

In addition to the above criticism, I argue that at the heart of Rorty's antirealism lies a deep contradiction between commonsense and irony. Farrell has sketched this tension in his paper "Rorty and Antirealism" and, below, I develop the criticism, giving it body and weight.

We have seen that Rorty gives us two options for 'world' - either we choose the realist's radically nonepistemic world (along with its Kantian problems) or we accept the world 'out there' in antirealist terms. Opting for the latter means that we accept 'world' as

a deliverance of commonsense; he urges us to be commonsensically realist and accept

that "most things... have the features they do in entire causal independence from the way

they are described."[27] The problem is that Rorty has ironically denounced commonsense

and leaves us with no way to characterize this commonsense *world* realistically; as

Farrell puts it: "we should not... suppose that he is committing himself ontologically to

such a world."[28] This contradiction is a fatal flaw in Rorty's position.

Rorty's world can be no more than the play of beliefs, sentences and language; the

realist "thinks that, deep down beneath all the texts, there is something which is not just

one more text... the pragmatist does not think there is anything like that."[29] If we are to

make more of it, as his appeal to commonsense suggests, then grave difficulty lies in the

fact that commonsense is part of a 'final vocabulary'. A final vocabulary is one that

supposedly "accurately represents something, a transparent medium... 'the one which

puts all doubts to rest' or 'the one which satisfies our criteria for ultimacy, or adequacy, or

optimality.'"[30] Yet commonsense, Rorty argues,

> is the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in
> terms of the final vocabulary to which they and those around them are habituated.
> To be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that
> final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of
> those who employ alternative final vocabularies.[31]

Commonsense solidifies a speaker's way of life and reinforces his community's way of

speaking to the point that it becomes a final vocabulary - a reflection of the rhetoric of

realism, a vocabulary that 'suffices to describe reality, get at its intrinsic nature or strikes

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[27] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," p. 23
[28] Farrell, "Rorty and Antirealism," p. 161.
[29] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," in <u>After Philosophy: End or Transformation</u>, ed. Kenneth Baynes et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), p. 54.
[30] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 75.
[31] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 74.

a real essence'.[32] Rorty hopes that if you are well educated, well read and sufficiently free

of ignorance then your commonsense should be overcome by a healthy sense of irony.

The ironist understands that the

> searches for a final vocabulary are not destined to converge... [S]entences like
> 'All men by nature desire to know' or 'Truth is independent of the human mind'
> are simply platitudes used to inculcate the local final vocabulary, the common
> sense of the West.... Ironists [are ironic] just insofar as their own final vocabulary
> does not contain such notions.[33]

Instead of utilizing commonsense Rorty's pragmatic antirealism aims to challenge it; the

ironist may partake in commonsense public rhetoric but such an indulgence is temporary.

The ironists have had the illusions of the subject-object picture torn from their eyes and,

in light of Rorty's antirealist conclusion, would view commonsense with contempt;

pragmatists

> should see themselves as working at the interface between the common sense of
> their community... and the startlingly counter-intuitive self-image sketched by...
> [antirealism]. They should see themselves as involved in a long-term attempt to
> change the rhetoric, the common sense, and the self-image of their community.[34]

One must conclude that Rorty's appeal to commonsense is flawed; he views

commonsense realism as devoid of content, it is the very thing that his antirealism seeks

to overcome. Rorty's appeal to pain (as the unifying force behind his liberal democracy,

which also serves as the grounds for the just expansion of 'We') is problematic in this

light. The notion of all humans sharing the common ability to feel pain and humiliation

seems straightforward enough, yet such an appeal mirrors Rorty's problematic appeal to

the commonsense world - it forces us into a situation where we require something beyond

language - a place where Rorty has forbidden us to go. There is nowhere from within his

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[32] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 74.
[33] Rorty, "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," p. 77.
[34] Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Enquiry? Davidson versus Wright," p. 300.

position to make such claims. Placing the world 'out there' invites representational

problems but to deny it as Rorty's antirealism does, Farrell suggests, invites linguistic

idealism;

> The resistance of the world to thought is simply what thought or our
> conversational habits count as resistance; there is no further causal independence
> that is forcing us to accommodate ourselves to its working... [T]here is little,
> then, to make us resist the temptation to think of him as suggesting not a thinking
> mind but a speaking voice (in his case a communal one) that produces all
> determinations out of itself.[35]

Rorty cannot combine commonsense with his antirealist elements - if forced the

tension between the two destabilizes Rorty's antirealism. His philosophy has a fatal

contradiction at its core.

3.4 Conclusion

The realist versus antirealist debate is one of the most important in contemporary

philosophy because the stakes are so high. Despite the magnitude of these stakes, we

have been given good reason to agree that metaphysical realism engenders philosophy

with representational machinery that is more trouble than it is worth. Philosophers **are**

better off abandoning talk of facts, metaphysical noncausal correspondence, and the idea

of a God's-Eye point of view. The epistemological model of knowledge as a mirror

between what is revealed to the subject, via the medium of consciousness or language,

and what is actually out there in the world has led philosophers in circles; Davidson and

Rorty are right to criticize this tradition. Indeed, Rorty is right to suggest that the threats

of the Kantian noumena, global error and skepticism *seem* poised to once again befall any

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[35] Farrell, "Rorty and Antirealism," p. 162.

philosopher who ventures back towards objectivity - but he is wrong to conclude that realism is impossible.

On the positive side, Rorty's arguments help us examine many realist assumptions, clarify issues revolving around representation and dispel many dogmas associated with the pursuit of objective truth. Unfortunately Rorty's philosophy swings past being a heuristic tool into a narrow conventionalism, extreme ethnocentrism and contradiction (possibly even towards linguistic idealism). In this final chapter we have seen how antirealism is unbalanced and inherently flawed. Rorty cuts language off just where it needs to get started, that is, as the intersubjective standard between all communicating agents that share this common world. Because Rorty will not allow our community of speakers to share this common ground with other language users we are artificially separated from them; understanding language means that the net of linguistic inclusion has to be cast much wider than Rorty will allow. And, if we were to take Rorty's leap into antirealism we should have to satisfactorily explain how he could appeal to the nonlinguistic via commonsense while claiming that language refers to nothing outside of itself - a paradox that seems unsolvable. Rorty's position is wrought with so many difficulties it can be rejected on its own merit alone.

Rejecting antirealism required, in my view, more than a negative platform; prior to these criticisms I have argued that we do not have to accept antirealism because we can maintain realism while avoiding its traditional pitfalls. This thesis has shown that we can get back to that solid ground though Davidson's naturalized causal-linguistic model. I believe that the realist position is sound and that Davidson has successfully adjusted it to a contemporary setting. Davidson has gotten us beyond the subject-object debate because

his antirepresentationalism has dropped the idea of correspondence (one-to-one or holistic) while respecting the ubiquity of language - language is not a medium we manipulate in order to form images of another radically separate world. Yet Davidson has given us good reason to continue to argue for the reality of objects existing and having features that exist independently of our descriptions. His new realism requires that we recognize the semantic relationship between meaning, belief and truth; in doing so we must also acknowledge the centrality of the concept of truth for language and thought. Language, Davidson has shown, gives us generally true beliefs and does tell us about the world. In abandoning representation, we have dropped the idea of truth as a mirror image between language and reality; epistemology in Davidson's mirror of meaning demands that we be modest about the quality of our knowledge and the methods we use in getting to know the world.

Davidson's reestablishment of realism has enormous implications for knowledge and philosophy. It means that we can continue to know and deal with that real world without desiring transcendence. Knowledge can be more than linguistic banter; we can avoid that sense of free floating and groundlessness that Rorty's antirealism requests. It means that philosophy can provide an understanding of truth and recognize its centrality without trying to escape the finitude in which human beings find themselves. Davidson has brought us to a place where we can philosophize about truth 'without stepping outside our skins' - we can see the world through having a language. Philosophy **can** be more than Rorty's alternative of "'seeing how things hang together' - which…means seeing how all the various vocabularies… hang together."[36] Rather than a final parting of ways,

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[36] Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 55.

Davidson has shown that a modest realist philosophy (in his case a linguistic one) can serve as the backdrop to practicing science with a new attitude - a science stripped of correspondence and left to its own devices. Without showing us a way off the 'linguistic merry-go-round', Rorty's name for the ubiquity of language, we have been shown the way back to hard ground - what we are spinning language from in the first place.

Given the considerations of this thesis, I conclude that realism can survive the downfall of representation, move beyond antirealism and get us back to the world.

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