4. The Explanation of Error

Davidson holds that if we had an analysis of the concept of error, we would have an analysis of the concept of objectivity or of thought itself. According to him, the very fact that we haven't managed to give such an analysis is a reflection of the fact that "...intentional phenomena cannot be reduced to something simpler or different." It might seem as though Davidson is pessimistic when it comes to the possibilities of analyzing and explaining intentionality, and thereby, the possibility of explaining error. All the same, he has repeatedly stated that he is searching for an explanation of error. This apparent pessimism combined with repeated acknowledgment of the lacking explanation of intentionality and error poses a challenge that cannot be disregarded.

In this article I go through Davidson's endeavor to analyze and explain error, and thereby thought, normativity, objectivity; in short, all that is considered characteristic for intentional creatures. In short, his attempt is to point to the biological constitution of man in addition to his own account of triangulation. This means that he proposes a two-tier explanation of the intentional, in which the essential conditions are human dispositions and language learning in a society of language users. Radical interpretation is the frame of the attempt, but this is obviously not the case for the reference to the biological dispositions of man. I argue that Davidson's hardships with the problem of explaining error stems from a discrepancy between his individual notion of language as idiolect, a notion that is intrinsic to radical interpretation, and his appeal to a society of language users. I maintain that a community based, or social, notion of language is needed. The reason for this is that when communication is smooth, an interpreter has no opportunity to check whether both the speaker and the interpreter are wrong. Unless this could be done, a notion of objective truth could not be constituted trough the process of interpretation in triangulation. The concept of objective truth is partly based on the possibility of performing a social check, but to the extent that the model of radical interpretation precludes this, the theory cannot solve the problem that it has generated. My analysis is based on a pass through of the situation that the radical interpreter finds himself in when he is dealing with the two different possible errors that he could confront.

1. An internal or an external perspective on intentionality?

Let us begin with the obvious, that we are competent intentional and norm-possessing speakers, who are in fact able to describe the world in ways that enables us to successfully interact with it. We do predicate, we do *say* something meaningful with our sentences, and we are able to communicate with other minds. Now, we could ask, why are we able to do so? We can take an internal perspective on intentionality and ask: "What are the conditions for thought, intentionality and for the concept of objective truth that we already possess?" We do have the concept of objective truth, and we therewith also have the concept of error. Hence, we're saying: "look, we *do* have propositional thought, intentionality *is* an existing phenomenon" and because of this, there is also a concept of truth and a concept of error. Having stated the obvious, we can still always ask some further questions about the background of intentionality. "How did we acquire this trait?" "What has been the condition under which intentionality has emerged?" "What, if anything, proceeds propositional thought?" This means we are attempting to explain the phenomenon starting at the inside moving outwards, and I therefore consider it an internal approach. An internal perspective on intentionality could certainly also consist of a conceptual analysis, where an account of the relations between key intentional concepts is given.[1]

On the other hand, from the point of view of external conditions, we would say that we know that *the non-propositional* exists, and from this we have to explain how, and possibly also if, the propositional could have emerged. We would then start on the outside of intentionality, or at least, we would say that the approach is an attempt at starting with the outside moving towards the inside. In this approach, the very existence of intentionality as a phenomenon in its own right is not considered obvious. In any case, in this approach we will have to explain how the non-intentional could *become* intentional, or how the intentional could "grow out of" the non-intentional. An objective world exists, and we have these dispositions to discriminate, we say, but how could norms emerge out of that? At first sight, questions as these seems impossible for Davidson to answer, since interpretation presuppose intentionality, even though radical interpretation in triangulation gives us an opportunity to break into the intentional from the non-intentional and non-normative "outside". In radical interpretation we can break into the intentional because linguistic

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[1] In article 6 I show how some of the central intentional concepts are related.

behavior provides non-semantic evidence for the meanings of sentences and for the speaker's beliefs. Either way, this "external" reflection on the conditions for thought and language is something that we do in addition to "internal" or intentionality-intrinsic considerations, and I would say that an informed view on intentionality should address both perspectives.

In "Externalisms", Davidson, in the attempt to reach an explanation of intentionality, sets up three conditions for the possibility of thought about an external world.[2] The first one is normality. This condition involves that contents of thoughts are being indicated in a process where (as a minimum) two creatures are «responding in characteristic ways to distal stimuli», so that a common cause of the most frequent cases is being potentially located as what determines the contents of their thoughts. This means that there is something that statistically or characteristically can be picked out as a type of cause for a given content of a thought. We may call this the normal cause of a given thought, and this will not be a normative concept of normality, but a statistical concept of normality.

When creatures respond in *non-characteristic* ways to distal stimuli, errors or misrepresentations can occur. If we base our search for the normal cause of the content of thoughts on less frequent cases, errors will also occur. Thus, error is a second condition for thought about an external world. Divergence from normally similar reactions could occur when we have said that something (specified) is normal, and this is a normality set by the most frequent cases.

But, from where did the normality come in the first place? Where does it start? What can explain that something particular turns out to be the normal cause for thought? Davidson holds that that which is relevantly similar (the cases that together pass as "normal") are based on our pre-natal dispositions to perceptually discriminate. This means that our notion of "similarity" starts in our present stage of evolution and current biological capacity. We are born with a capacity to discriminate in perception in specific ways, and this is yet another condition.

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[2] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 9.

According to Davidson, these three factors (dispositions, normality and error) are necessary, but insufficient, conditions of thought and language. That is, he maintains that they cannot explain why intentional and normative activity (such as talking and thinking about parts of reality) can arise. How could we then give a sufficient account of conditions for thought and language?[3] In bringing our attention to language acquisition, which Davidson talks about as an "intermediate stage", he points us in the direction of society. I will hold that this could be seen as a fourth condition, and I think that Davidson also utilizes it as such. The four conditions for thought about an external world are thus disposition, normality (the common cause of the most frequent cases), error, and language acquisition in a social setting.

The last condition mentioned is that we are being raised in a society of language-users. When we as children acquire a first language, society is our teacher. Through ostensive processes, we learn to connect words and concepts to «normal» middle-sized objects and events. This is an intermediate, but crucial stage. If this stage were not in the picture, it would be very hard to see how a creature ever could go from acting on dispositions to acting on norms or following rules. According to Davidson's story we will gradually move on from dispositions to discriminations, through learning to connect to the world through ostension, and towards independent conceptualization and rule following. This last step, the transition towards being an independent rule-follower and a mature language user demands interaction with a linguistic society. But, we are obviously still in lack of sufficient conditions for thought and language. Davidson says that he is «...persuaded that the basic idea is right: only social interaction brings with it the space in which the concepts of error, and so of meaning and of thought, can be given application. A social milieu is necessary, but *not sufficient* for objective thought.»[4] We can therefore sum up this attempt at explaining intentionality by saying that these four conditions do not suffice for explaining intentionality, objective thought and hence error.[5]

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[3] For Davidson, this question is the same as asking for sufficient conditions for rationality, intentionality, normativity, and meaning, and also for ascription of propositional attitudes.

[4] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 3, my italics.

[5] See also article 5 on error and the teacher-learner-object triangle, where the teacher at one vertex represents "society". Otherwise, "society" is typically hinting at the interaction of two speaker-interpreters.

Now, what about a more clearly internal perspective? The advantage of an immanent approach is that it might be less open to meaning-skepticism and less open to skepticism about the world than an external perspective.[6] The main disadvantage may be that we are unable to give a satisfactory analysis and explanation of intentionality, in the sense of really coming on the outside of, or to the bottom of, intentional phenomena. A relevant and timely question is: "What would constitute *an explanation* (not only an account) of intentionality?" In his 1996 article "Externalisms", Davidson asks what the sufficient conditions of thought are, and then says that: "…if we could answer this question we would have an analysis of thought. It is hard to think what would satisfy us, which did not amount to a reduction of the intentional to the extensional, and this, in my opinion, is not to be expected. What further progress we can make will be in the direction of theory building within the realm of the rational, not reduction of it to something else."[7] Davidson's search for an explanation of error is thus to be a search from within the intentional and from within the theory of radical interpretation. Still, the felt need to find an explanation of error from the outside of intentionality and thereby also an explanation of intentionality seems never quite to have left Davidson. I would claim that a naturalization, in the sense of giving an explanation of intentionality on basis of the principles that the natural sciences accept would anyhow not give the wanting external explanation, even if it, contrary to Davidson's expectations, should prove possible. The reason is that naturalization in this sense would give us what we do not want, or need, an account where intentionality and human interest is out of the picture. This does not imply that I think we can be generally content leaving out an external perspective on intentionality.

A legitimate and understandable reason to raise the question of the problem of error in the first place is the quest for objectivity of thought and meaning, and the quest for objective knowledge, or rather a quest for the justification of our knowledge about the world and about other minds. A possible motive for a search for an analysis of the concept of error is therefore the search for an analysis of the concept of objectivity and objective truth. A need for an analysis of the concept of objectivity is understandable for anybody who is claiming (or denying!) that we can have – and do in fact have – objective knowledge about the

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[6] I will not argue for this assumption here, but it is further discussed in article 1 and the synthesis.

world. And why would we make that claim in the first place if we were not to some extent in the sway of the skeptic and his challenge? It seems to me that unless Davidson felt some kind of pressure from the skeptic, he would not feel the pressure towards giving an explanation of error. This is a pressure from meaning skepticism, from the skeptic about objective knowledge about the world, from the skeptic about objective knowledge of our own minds and from the skeptic about objective knowledge of other minds. But again, as mentioned, the problem of error is also a problem internal to the method of radical interpretation.

Another possible motive for the urge to provide an analysis of the concept of error is found in challenges from Wittgenstein. I think about the challenge of explaining what it means to follow a rule, and also the challenge of explaining what is involved in saying that there is no such thing as a private language. Following a rule means going on in the right way. A learner who goes on as the teacher does would not sufficiently prove that he possesses normativity or has thoughts. According to Davidson one has to be in the grasp of truth conditions, and one has to have an awareness of the possibility of error to be an intentional creature. Going on in the right way also presuppose that there is a wrong way. Thus, in order to be a rule follower one has to possess an awareness of the possibility of error on one's own behalf. And, if we can explain and analyze the concept of error, Davidson would grant that we could explain what rule following (and thus normativity) is about. But, the private language problem-complex questions the very intelligibility of assuming that somebody could establish and maintain a language on his or her own. Objectivity is possible only in the presence of norms, or rather, in the presence of norm-possessing knowers, and norms can only be established in a community of knowers. Hence it follows that objectivity is only possible in a community consisting of several (or, at the very least, two) creatures that we can say are knowers. An explanation of the problem of error would in this way potentially explain both meaning and knowledge, and would give a clue to the normativity of semantics as well as a clue to the normativity of epistemology.

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[7] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms", (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 9.

Explaining intentionality, normativity and objectivity is therefore the big picture when it comes to explaining error. Within this big picture, there is the more limited and perhaps more methodological question of how to explain the possibility of error *within* the model of triangulation in radical interpretation, or rather, when we base ourselves on the method of radical interpretation. This problem seems at first sight to be more limited since it deals with the question of how we could explain, or even only give meaning to, the possibility that both the speaker and the interpreter are wrong, when communication is smooth. We will start by looking at the possibility of error within Quinean radical translation and then move on to radical interpretation.

2. The possibility of error within Radical Translation and Radical Interpretation

In Quine's radical translation, the principle of charity says that I must assume it to be more probable that I have translated incorrectly than assuming that the speaker actually believe something that is "glaringly false" by my lights. In Quine's version, the principle of charity tells me to stick to the assumption of mistake on the side of ascribed meaning rather than mistake on the side of ascribed belief. So, when communication is not successful, and I seem to have run into an error, I try to revise my translation manual as a first approach. If I find that the revision called for will bring about a radical change in the manual, and this change makes the manual much more complicated, and maybe also gives it a decrease in explanatory power, this will be an indication that I should choose simplicity over correctness on the speaker's behalf. In effect, this means that the speaker (and the belief) will be counted wrong, given that I find nothing that can explain how the speaker acquired this false belief. I therefore eventually ascribe this false belief to the speaker, thus, rather than revising my translation manual, I make him less rational. Quine's principle says we should be careful in, and avoid to the greatest extent possible, ascribing error to the beliefs of a speaker in such a way. Ascription of error to the speaker is to be done only when we have no alternative option, or when we see it as choosing Scylla, when a radical change of translation manual is considered to be Carbides.

Davidson created the problem of error for himself by not appealing to Quine's concept of stimulus meaning as what needed to be matched for translation or interpretation.[8] In Quine's original formulation of the theory of radical translation, the concept of stimulus meaning was crucial. The matching mentioned is a matching of some factor in the verbal behavior of speaker or informant on the one hand, and some factor in the (possible) verbal behavior of the translator or interpreter's side on the other hand. There has to be some matching between the two in order for translation or interpretation to occur, and according to Quine's early versions of radical translation, stimulus meanings of informant and manual were the factors to be matched.

Now, the radical interpretation approach does not appeal to the concept of stimulus meaning; on the other hand, we seek the truth conditions of the speaker's utterance. The truth conditions for the speaker's utterance is to be matched with the truth conditions of a reasonable interpretation (by the interpreter) of the utterance; that is, a reasonable utterance by the interpreter's own light, of course, which in effect means that the utterance must have as its content a belief, or a possible belief, of the interpreter. In radical interpretation, truth conditions of utterances are to be matched but what does such a match demonstrate? Does it show that both the speaker and the interpreter are right or does it show that they are both wrong? The match of the truth conditions only tells us that the truth conditions are similar for the speaker and the interpreter. What can we appeal to in this situation? The matching of verbal behavior is in radical interpretation no longer sufficient for being content that the interpretation is a likely and fair interpretation.

In Quine's radical translation, matching verbal behavior is the final factor to be found in making sure one has reached an acceptable translation. ("Acceptable" meaning that the verbal behavior is translatable, and translatability is in its turn to be judged according to success in communication.) Originally, stimulus meanings were to be matched, and Quine considered the stimulus meaning of an utterance or a sentence to be the only meaning a sentence can have. However, according to Davidson, in 1990 Quine "decided to do away with the matching of neural patterns as the key to translation". Davidson further thinks that

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[8] See p. 730 of Davidson's "Reply to Dagfinn Føllesdal" in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999.

Quine from that time on is letting empathy be a "substitute" for sameness of stimulus meaning.[9] Quine's own presentation of the changed situation is described in his article "Three Indeterminacies"[10] and comports well with Davidson's description. Instead of "intersubjective likeness of stimulation" Quine stresses the importance of empathy. The linguist, or translator, is to project himself "into the witness's position"[11] Empathy [in the perception of another's perceptual situation] instead of matching of stimulus meanings thus works well for Quine and radical translation. One could say, as Davidson does, that Quine is "bypassing the problem of error on the principle that translation will succeed if errors match".[12] Or, one could just as well say that Quine never really had a problem of error in the sense that the problem of error has come to be a problem within radical interpretation. For Quine, if verbal behavior matches, the translation manual will function, and we will know that this is so when we have success in communication.[13] There are no further criteria to be found.

Now, the champion of radical interpretation could not settle for stimulus meanings to be matched, but could he possibly settle for empathy? If not, why is it insufficient for *the radical interpreter* to share the verbal habits of a speaker when it suffices for the radical translator? For the interpreter and speaker to share verbal habits is insufficient because "both might be wrong and both might simply be programmed or conditioned to act similarly when exposed to similar stimuli"[14] Radical interpretation aims at assigning truth conditions to a speaker's utterances. The truth conditions of the speaker's utterance are to be matched with the truth conditions of an utterance's reasonable interpretation, which, in effect, means a match with the truth conditions of a possible utterance of the interpreter himself/herself. According to Davidson, if we consider the first case, in which both the

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Willard Van Orman Quine: "Three Indeterminacies" in R. Barrett and R. Gibson (eds.): *Perspectives on Quine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 3 f.
[11] Ibid, p. 4.
[12] In Davidson's "Reply to Dagfinn Føllesdal", p. 730 in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999.
[13] "Success in communication" is according to Quine to be judged by "smoothness of conversation, by frequent predictability of verbal and non-verbal reactions, and by coherence and plausibility of native testimony." He also points out that "fluency of conversation and the effectiveness of negation" is what we judge manuals by. (In Willard Van Orman Quine: "Three Indeterminacies" in R. Barrett and R. Gibson (eds.): *Perspectives on Quine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 4)
[14] Davidson in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, p. 730.

interpreter and the speaker are wrong, we would have nothing objective to appeal to in deciding that they were wrong. Moreover, he seems to think that the second case, in which both parties are programmed or conditioned to act similarly when exposed to similar stimuli, is another but similar version of the problem. It is not obvious to me that these two cases are similar, in the sense that they represent the same problem. The problem of the first case is that some standard of truth and falsity is needed to say that both are wrong. But if both were programmed to act similarly when exposed to similar stimuli, and given that nobody ever had a chance to find that they were only "programs", do we then really have a problem? For one, if we are dealing with creatures that could be programmed in this way, it is obvious that we are not dealing with creatures that are capable of independent judgment. Anyhow, from the premises given in radical interpretation, I cannot see the problem in this situation as these creatures would we only doubtfully be able to radically interpret. However, it might become a problem if we add the premise that radical interpretation is set up for *explaining* the normativity of intentionality-equipped actors, or that radical interpretation is supposed to show a distinction between those programmed to act similarly as others and those acting from their own reasons. I will not follow this lead further here, so let's just stick to the first case, where both interpreter and speaker are wrong.

Sharing of verbal habits between speaker and interpreter could, we have said, indicate that both are right or it might indicate that both are wrong. Interpretability, then, is apparently insufficient for the defender of radical interpretation, even if translatability were sufficient for Quine. Assignment of truth conditions to the utterances of the speaker is quite another matter than sheer matching of verbal behavior. And there is not much help in empathy, because it is no longer a problem of perception. However, the concept of truth and mastery of the concept of truth cannot *come out of* matching of verbal behavior [even if I would think that creatures that can *estimate* matching of verbal behavior also would be capable of assignment of truth conditions and mastery of the concept of truth]. With the concept of truth comes the idea of an objective world, but as Davidson points out, if we ask where a sense of objectivity comes in, perception and empathy in perception cannot answer this question.[15]

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[15] Ibid.

On page 321 in "The Structure and Content of Truth", Davidson notes that "The difficulty with what we may call the distal theory of reference is that it makes error hard to explain, the crucial gap between what is believed true and what is true; since the distal theory bases truth on belief, the problem is crucial." Why is there a difference between a proximal and a distal theory in this question? One would think that, in principle, this could be the same. I'd say that it is rather Davidson's demand for objective truth that seems different. And it is highly probable that this has been a motivation to introduce the distal theory in the first place. He says that "The distal theory bases truth on belief" and it is subsequently vital that he manages to establish a notion of truth based on belief.

In predicting that, in radical interpretation, the belief of the speaker will emerge based on his reactions to our common environment, I am guided by what I hold true and by what I find coherent with the beliefs that I so far have ascribed to the speaker. The belief that I ascribe the speaker is therefore a hypothetical ascription partly modeled on my own system of beliefs. Now, assuming that the verbal behavior of the speaker and me as an interpreter correlates (which, in this case, involves matching of the ascription of the truth value of a sentence/an utterance), we can see the dimension of the problem of error. The problem is that even if our verbal behaviors cohere we could both be wrong, and as an interpreter, I will not have any objective correlatives as long as continued perception will only provide more of the same kind of "evidence" that I already have. Further perception and empathy in perceiving will not bring us closer, as long as matching of verbal behavior is the closest we can get in this dimension. How can I then know whether or not we are both wrong?

Let's follow this lead back to where we started. The concept of error comes with the idea of an objective world and the concept of truth. The problem of error is therefore another side of this sense of objectivity that is involved in interpretation. What we now have to do is to explain how error is at all possible in radical interpretation. Perception and empathy in perception could obviously never solve *this* problem. According to Davidson, the reason is that those who perceive propositionally already master a concept of error as they have an idea of an objective world. We cannot explain the possibility of error by appealing to perception, because perceivers who are language users are, according to Davidson, already propositional perceivers and thus already in mastery of the concept of error. So how can we then give an account of (and explain) the possibility of error in radical interpretation?

Again, if we turn to the *differences* between radical translation and radical interpretation, we can see that the problem of error emerges somewhere in the transition from radical translation to radical interpretation. What was the crucial change that occurred in this transition? What introduced the new problem? Where, or in what, does the difference lie? I think both Davidson and Quine have been right in focusing on the introduction of a concept of truth to explain the difference. In Davidson's words, the relevant difference between radical translation and radical interpretation is that interpretation aims at "assignment of truth conditions to an informants utterances"[16] Davidson further notices that "nothing in Quine's approach seemed to me suited to explaining how the concept of truth was to be introduced." This should not be a surprise to anyone familiar with Quine's approach. Quine's focus was simply never on truth or on explaining normativity.

Quine always emphasized that there is no more to meaning than what can be pointed out empirically in a situation of radical translation. In Quine's words: "there is no justification for collating linguistic meanings, unless in terms of men's dispositions to respond overtly to socially observable stimulations."[17] Thus, regularity in verbal behavior is what we have on the table when collating meanings and other intentional phenomena. But, we will also make adjustments towards securing internal coherence and rationality in the systems of meaning and belief that we ascribe to the speaker. This is secured by the principle of charity. So, there is regularity of verbal behavior *and* there are some internal and holistic considerations for the system as a whole to take into account when collating linguistic meanings. The weight of these considerations, as well as the weight of the empirical clues, must be measured up against the aim of a well functioning manual of translation. We know that the manual works well when we can communicate successfully with the speaker. If, in this setting, we were to think of what is involved when the verbal behavior of the speaker and the verbal behavior of the translator complies (which means that, as translator, I agree to the utterance of the informant based on what I can see that he sees), we would simply think that as long as agreement exists and communication is smooth, there is no more to ask for in the sense that nothing more is needed and nothing more is possible. The

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[16] Ibid
[17] Willard Van Orman Quine: *Word and Object*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1960, preface.

possibility that both of us might be wrong when in agreement therefore has no place in the setting of radical translation, and is not a problem anyhow.

What is then different in the setting of radical interpretation? Something must be different, since the possibility that both of us might be wrong poses a problem in radical interpretation and not in radical translation. First, the concept of truth has been brought in. It seems to be the shift from evidence to truth that makes such a big difference. Could there be something about the metaphysical pretensions of the concept of truth that simply does not cohere well with the otherwise empirical and naturalized conception of the radical interpretation thought experiment? Even if truth is extensional in Davidson's theory and a relation of satisfaction is all that is demanded, a T-sentence also requires a previous understanding of the concept of truth. When we say "'snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white", we must understand the concept of true in order to understand what this sentence means.[18] Hence, it is insufficient to know the truth conditions of "snow is white". This previous understanding of truth (which we rely for the theory of truth to provide a theory of meaning) is crucial. It is the attitude of "holding true" that is the interpreter's guiding star, but as we know, neither the speaker's nor the interpreter's attitude of "holding true" are more than analytical hypotheses. Secondly, the principle of charity, and thus the consideration for the system as a whole, has gained weight. There is definitely a difference between the "across-the-board-ascription" of charity that has been prescribed in radical interpretation and the minimal principle that Quine introduced. This made for a shift away from the more empirical orientation (which was predominant even in the earlier versions of radical interpretation) towards a greater emphasis on overall considerations of rationality and internal coherence.[19] Otherwise, as it were in radical translation, we basically have to

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[18] Davidson does not explain the concept, as he takes it to be primitive.

[19] According to Dagfinn Føllesdal, Davidson's second thoughts about the maxim of maximizing agreement "saved" him from an even heavier leaning on "reason" to the disadvantage of "perception". Føllesdal's own example, with the big tree between the rabbit and his interlocutor as a cause of disagreement that could be explained by the interpreter, is presumed to be the reason for Davidson's change of mind. It is by Føllesdal taken to have lead to Davidson's modification "maximize agreement where you expect to find agreement". One wouldn't expect one's interlocutor to agree when you know that he doesn't see what you see. The observational constraint on interpretation was according to Føllesdal after that well taken care of by Davidson. (Dagfinn Føllesdal "Triangulation", pp 719-728, in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, p. 722 and 723) If Føllesdal is right, it seems that interpretationism as an epistemological strategy for explaining objective knowledge about the world very nearly were lost with the maxim of maximizing agreement, or at the least all but coherence-theoretical ambitions would be lost.

rely on observations of behavioral regularity when comparing meanings and beliefs in radical interpretation. But it is obvious that the crucial difference does not have to lie with *only* these two differences, a combination of them, or with either one alone.

Hoping to address the problem of explaining the possibility of error in radical interpretation in a more fruitful manner, we will take a closer look at the notion of error itself. What do we really mean by "an error" or "a mistake" in connection with radical interpretation?

3. Two kinds of error

For an interpreter, there are two possible sources for mistakes. He can be wrong on what is perceived by the two parties as the common object, or he can be wrong about words. Being wrong about words could be a mistake about where to locate the belief ascribed to the speaker into the already ascribed system of belief of the speaker, that is, its location in the truth theory for the speaker. Alternatively, the interpreter could employ a non-appropriate translation that certainly also has the result of giving the belief a wrong location in the system ("conceptual inadequacy"). Now, obviously, the speaker can also make mistakes. In a similar fashion, the speaker may make a factual mistake, make use of the wrong words, or employ inadequate concepts. Hence, there are two kinds of error: On one hand, error that involves false beliefs and, on the other hand, error of meaning. In terms of an individual, or from the speaking subject's perspective, this difference will, on one hand, involve error as saying something false and, on the other hand, error as not knowing the meaning of the words used, or applying words in a way that precludes an interpreter's understanding of the other.[20] Of course, both kinds of error are familiar to us, and we have experienced this often enough, in others and in ourselves.

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[20] There could of course be many ways of making a linguistic mistake, or being wrong about words. In the radical interpretational frame we could say that it lies somewhere in a continuum from the speaker's being insensitive to or unjustified in her assumptions about how the other will take what she says, and to, in the other end of the line, how the other (the interpreter) is insensitive to or unjustified in the way she is taking what you say. This is all there could be to a linguistic mistake in the interpretational frame that we here have acceded to. And sometimes the failure will perhaps be beyond sensitive and justified speaking and interpreting, The failure could be complete, such that communication breaks down, or it could be only slightly confusing, or any place in between.

According to the radical interpretational perspective there are only two factors that determine the content of a belief. First, there is the object or event in the world that caused the belief, and second, there is the location of the belief in relation to other beliefs in the network of beliefs. So, according to this view, we would believe that if something goes wrong, the error must be in one of these two areas. We would not say that both of these errors deal with false belief, we would rather say that the first kind of error (error in the assumption of what caused the belief) is about false belief and that the second kind of error (error in where the belief is located) is error in meaning, or inadequate employment of concepts. Now, within radical translation the question is, of course, whether we can separate belief and meaning so that we can know what kind of error we are dealing with. In early phases of radical translation there is no actual possibility to separate the two, but we use the principle of charity as an *analytical* tool to find the meaning of the speaker's sentence by holding his beliefs constant. This means that the separation is hypothetical and we are producing an analytical hypothesis about the meaning of the sentence. So, in the very beginning of radical interpretation, we could not actually find out whether an error is caused by wrong belief or wrong meaning. However, the situation changes when we reach a level of smooth communication, as we can ask questions and, possibly, collect enough evidence to make a more substantiated decision on the origin of the error. As the process of interpretation proceeds and our hypotheses are either corroborated or replaced, we have more evidence to back up our claim (that the error was an error of meaning or an error of belief).

In radical interpretation, we never reach a level where we can be completely certain that *the* correct hypothesis has been found, and this will also be true in the case of determining which kind of error we are dealing with. Indeed, Davidson would hold the view that there is a principled indeterminacy in this question.[21] Since we have said that there are two main

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[21] In "What Thought Requires" Davidson asks "How will the learner or interpreter discover when he is applying a different concept than the one his teacher or informant had in mind, and when one of them is misapplying the same concept? Some answers to this question will appeal to the power of consensus, but this cannot be conclusive. Of course, consensus of *use*, where use is assumed to reflect what the teacher or society *means*, is just what the learner or radical interpreter needs to recognize, but consensus of *application* does not distinguish the two varieties of error. As far as I can see, nothing in the observable behavior of teacher or learner with respect to an isolated sentence can sort this out. Further distinctions depend on relations among uttered sentences. The relation of evidential support provides powerful clues...." In this sequence Davidson is dealing with the two kinds of errors, but he focuses on the situation of teacher and learner, not the situation with two speaker-interpreters. He further says: "the large and necessary step is learning to *explain* errors. [] It

kinds of error in interpretation, it seems natural to ask: "What are the conditions under which they can emerge?"

Propositional seeing – a condition for two kinds of error

Where does error enter the picture? As long as there are only casual relations to the world (reactions to objects and events that a creature perceives), I will argue that error of the "meaning kind" cannot exist. A purely causal relation to the world, and only reactions to the objects and events that a creature perceives, seems equivalent to Russell-Hanson's notion of "seeing".[22] With only "seeing" going on, there can be no error of the kind "mistake in employment of words", but with "seeing as" (or, even more obvious, "seeing that"/propositional seeing) there is a chance of this kind of error coming in. The possibility that I can be wrong in employing words and concepts cannot arise when only seeing (or perceiving) is going on, but this is not to say that there can, in fact, be only seeing going on for us at all (if "us" refers to "adult human beings" or, rather, "human beings with a fully fledged language"). It seems to me that when we "see as" or when we "see that", as we may have little chance of avoiding, the possibility for this kind of error is always present.

This is not to say that everything that goes on in our heads is propositional, but surely, it means that all that we would properly call *thinking* is conceptual or propositional. According to Davidson's view, there is no difference between the conceptual and the propositional; indeed, having a concept means having already classified, and that *is* to form a proposition. In the instant a category is formed, some things belong to it and some things do not. In this way, the propositional is not an additional step upon the conceptual, as the conceptual is always propositionally structured in advance. Thus, propositional seeing is not a general condition for error in perception, but a condition for error of meaning. This means that propositional seeing is a condition for the possibility of *two* kinds of error.

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is [] at this point that the distinction becomes clear between falsely thinking a bull is a cow, and simply applying the word 'cow' to both." In Davidson's *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 144 and 145. It thus seems that Davidson hold that we actually *can* sort out this difference when we are full-fledged users of language, and thus that we can decide which of out of two kinds of error we are dealing with.

[22] See Norwood Russell Hanson: *Patterns of Discovery*, Cambridge University Press, London 1958, rpr. 1969, pp. 19-24.

What about the other kind of error, the kind that involves only "seeing"? If we think of the example with the dog barking up the wrong tree, it feels natural to say that he is in error. It seems to be an adequate description of the situation to say that the dog is making an empirical mistake. But how can we know this for fact? What would our evidence be for saying that the dog, upon the discovery of the cat coming down from another tree than the one he was barking up, realizes that he has been in error? If I maintain that we couldn't know what kind of mistake the dog has made, this will *not* automatically amount to a denial of any form of thinking in the animal. However, it does imply a denial of the methodological availability of the mind of a non-linguistic creature, and this is so because we cannot, in the dog, find and specify a particular set of beliefs in which to locate the (presumably) wrong belief. Hence, we cannot decide that the dog's error is empirical because this would demand another kind of notion with which to contrast it, and methodologically this is out of question. The case of the possibility of mistake in non-linguistic beings is therefore out of reach for us, and this is *my* main reason for reserving our specific notion of mistake for speakers.

Davidson could be willing to go a bit further here, and say that as long as the dog doesn't have concepts it cannot be making a mistake. Davidson explicitly denies that the notion of mistake here involved applies to speechless. He would hold that the dog has the power to discriminate, and maybe also that the dog is doing what it is programmed to do. Davidson would hold that as long as the dog, from its point of view, is unaware of its own mistake, we would not have the right reason to say that he has mistaken one tree for another. We should note that the applied concept of mistake is not just any concept of mistake, but a concept established from within intentionality. In general, there are, of course, good reasons for saying that dogs make mistakes, but it could not be justified in such a way that it could be part of a set of reasonable analytical hypotheses of a radical interpreter. One of Davidson's other reasons for limiting ascription of concepts is that we could end up in a situation in which we would have to ascribe concepts to any living organism responding to its environment.[23] And it is plain to see that this could come close to making the notion of concept meaningless. According to Davidson, "A creature that has a concept knows that

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[23] See for instance Davidson's "The Problem of Objectivity" in *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 8.

the concept applies to things independently of what it believes. A creature that cannot entertain the thought that it may be wrong has no concepts, no thoughts."[24] Thus, we have to conclude that the concept of truth and objectivity combines with awareness of the possibility of error, and also, that the awareness of the possibility of error comes with propositional thinking. On this point, there is a potential discord between Davidson and me, and the discord would lie in the unclarified justification for the case. I will maintain that the reason for the case is epistemological; based on the methodology of radical interpretation it is a question of limited access to a dog's beliefs. An alternative stand is that we also rely on an ontological reason in drawing this conclusion.

Idiolect and two kinds of error

Eva Picardi has also been preoccupied with the notions of error and mistake within a theory of radical interpretation. She is questioning the possibility for distinguishing between the two different kinds of error in Davidson's theory of radical interpretation. "… if we forfeit all appeal to a socially shared language, the distinction between making a linguistic mistake and making a conceptual or factual mistake becomes too blurred. It is a danger of Davidson's whole approach that the notion of an error becomes an utter riddle."[25]

I agree with Picardi that it is important to uphold the distinction between the two kinds of mistake. If we think about Quine's original formulation of the principle, in which he holds that we should assume that we have misunderstood the speaker's language rather than that he is wrong about the world, and Davidson's description of the application of the principle as "… holding belief constant while solving for meaning", it soon becomes clear that in radical translation and radical interpretation we have to be able to make some sense of such distinctions as the ones Picardi mentions. The distinction between belief and meaning is crucial to the project of radical interpretation, even if we cannot separate the two until relatively late in an interpretational process. Picardi's point seems, however, to be that it is Davidson's denial of language as socially shared that threatens the notion of error. It is not clear from the context which part of Davidson's theory she hints at. But he has famously

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[24] Donald Davidson: "What Thought Requires" in *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 141.

[25] Eva Picardi: "Sensory Evidence and Shared Interest", pp 171-185 in Mario de Caro: *Interpretations and Causes*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1999, p. 182.

denied that there is such a thing as language, which then is identified as "a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases".[26] In this context, it is first of all a denial of conventions as governing sentence meanings, and the trouble with Picardi's point is that it is by no means obvious that language has to be involved with conventions in order to be socially shared. Even so, Picardi seems to hold that it is Davidson's focus on the idiolect that endangers or blurs the distinction between making a linguistic mistake and making a factual mistake. And I think she is right about that, even though I disagree that Davidson's anti-conventionalism is to be blamed for the predicament.

4. The Social Check for Error

The thesis of the indeterminacy of translation says there are many *correct* ways of describing a specific part of reality. But how can we know if, or when, one of the ways of describing reality is *wrong*? Some ways are wrong ways of describing things; that is to say, some descriptions or beliefs are false. As we have seen, there could be at the least two sources for an incorrect belief. First, that one thinks one has seen something that one possibly couldn't have seen, thus that one has a perception that is not in concordance with the ways of objects or events themselves. The only possible check here is a social check, since we have to check our percepts, or rather perceptual beliefs against the percepts/perceptual beliefs of others. Even if one would not admit of something like "the ways of objects and events themselves" ("the given"), one would have to admit that some beliefs or descriptions of reality could be outright false. The other possible source is wrong words, i.e. that one gives a wrong description because one has chosen words to express one's perceptions that do not cover the perceived, or one has chosen words in such a way that the interpreter could not be expected to understand. One then has perceived things correctly, but employed words in an unacceptable or inadequate way. Again, only a form of social check can be performed to say this much. Both sources of error could lead to impossible descriptions and false sentences, but only one of these two possibilities involves false beliefs about the world on the part of the speaker.

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[26] Donald Davidson: "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", pp. 433-46 in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, p. 446.

Now that we have established that a social check is the relevant check for error, no matter which sort of error, it is time to deal with the details of a social check. How is the check to be conducted within the theory of radical interpretation? In Eva Picardi's "Sensory Evidence and Shared Interests", as recently mentioned the question is how a social check at all could be performed when we operate within a theory where the notion of language is confined to idiolects.[27] Could the radical interpreter ever determine whether or not the interpretee employs words in an unacceptable way? In fact, it seems that the radical interpreter could only check this against earlier occasions of description of parts of the world from the mouth of this particular speaker, at a given time-sequence, as we have to assume that the only available concept of language is individual, e.g. idiolects. Each act of radical interpretation deals with only one speaker for a limited period of time. If the speaker seems to have made an error and the interpreter's analytical hypotheses seems in some sense invalid, the reason for this has to be found in the speaker's previous utterances, in specific circumstances, or the reason could not at all be found. The radical interpreter can only consider previous utterances and previous behavior in general. Thus, he can check the coherence with previous utterances and correlate the circumstances for the present utterance with those of previous utterances. This means that the interpreter is (again) checking the relationship between what he can perceive, which he can see that the speaker also perceives, and the utterance that the speaker gave as a response to the common perception. A perception check will not provide anything new. On the other hand, the interpreter would often have a so-called "prior theory" about how to deal with the utterances of the speaker, and this prior theory could be based upon earlier experiences with members of the same community or even with the same speaker.[28] The prior theory of the interpreter *could* be seen as a rudimentary theory about the language of the society.

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[27] Davidson has tried to calm similar worries by saying that "the intention of the speaker to be interpreted in a certain way provides the 'norm'; the speaker falls short of his intention if he fails to speak in such a way as to be understood as he intended." (Donald Davidson: "The Second Person", in his *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 116.) Thus it seems that the norm for the speaker, that by which he knows how to go on, in order to go on according to the rule, lies in himself. This means that the speaker, and not (only) the interpreter represents society, in the sense that the speaker holds the norm to such an extent that he knows what he have to do in order to be understood by the interpreter. But, as we will see, this will explain the problem of error only up to the point of understanding and smooth communication between speaker and interpreter. And this is Quine's criterion for success in radical translation, but Davidson cannot resign to smooth communication due to his demand for objective truth. (The worry were mouthed in the question: "But haven't we, by eliminating the condition that the speaker must go on as the interpreter (or others) would, at the same time inadvertently destroyed all chance of characterizing linguistic error?" Ibid.)

However, based on this, the interpretation would not typically be radical; and even so, the point is that the interpretation of the speaker is expressed in the interpreter's "passing theory". It seems the interpreter has no way out. Therefore, the common or societal aspect of language use between the radical interpreter and the speaker who communicates smoothly, is so to speak, fastened only in one end. It seems the social confinements have had the chance to manifest themselves only in the emergence of the speaker and interpreter's individual languages (i.e. in ostensive language learning).

It seems as if though intersubjectivity and the social are important only for language *acquisition*. This is in discord with Davidson's view on the matter. According to his general view, corrections and refinements of beliefs and linguistic expression of beliefs is a continuous process. But, given that the concept of language is individual, and therefore, that a speaker's language can only be checked against itself, how can a social check be performed? The radical interpreter can only perform such a check based on the communication between the speaker and himself on a given occasion. Hence, what he can check, and which could be relevant here, is only whether or not he and the speaker in a setting with "occasion-sentences" seems to be choosing the same objects or events in a manner that establishes regularity of verbal behavior. In this way, he can check over time whether the correlations between verbal behavior and stimuli are the same for the speaker, and whether, over a given time, these correlated sets are the same for the two parties. Otherwise, disrupted communication is the only way to notice that something is wrong. But this means that the interpreter cannot know that anything is wrong when communication is *not disrupted*. This is what I would call "the hard problem"; *(how) could an interpreter come to know whether or not both interpretee and interpreter are wrong, as long as communication is smooth?*

Hence, in the sense that the radical interpreter cannot access a "society", or third party, the radical interpretation situation does not seem to allow social checks. The interpretationist framework assumes that the two-creature methodological frame is already intersubjective and, thus, social. But from the radical interpreter's point of view, social checks cannot

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[28] Donald Davidson: "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", pp. 433-46 in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, p. 442.

actually be performed. There is nowhere to turn for further corrections or corroborations. That established; why do we then need a social check at all when communication is smooth? Why wouldn't we just think that as long as communication is smooth nothing is wrong?

Again, it seems to be the demand for objective truth that forces us into this situation. In Quine's theory of radical translation, this situation never occurs, and it seems to me that one of the reasons is that objective truth was never a basic concept in his approach.[29] As long as communication is smooth, translation manuals can be set up in satisfactory ways, and something more is never demanded. The notion of objective truth seems to be out of reach for radical interpreter and speaker. What could then be the solution to our problem? To stop yearning for objective truth? To change our language concept from individual to social to enable understanding and explain that two communicating speakers can both be mistaken about the world and about the employment of words? If we choose the latter, we will, in effect, have dismissed radical interpretation as an approach in its entirety. The methodology of radical interpretation is built on interpretation of a speaker (and his language) within a given period of time. I cannot see a way to modify this fundamental condition within the framework of radical interpretation. If we decide that we should stop yearning for objective truth, it is hard to see how we could still find the approach of radical interpretation relevant for our understanding of human intentionality, thought and language, and not the least; how radical interpretation can be important for an investigation into the conditions of objective knowledge. A notion of objective knowledge without a notion of objective truth is not easy to cash out.

My ambition is not to give a solution to the problem, but our interests in the truth about the world other minds and ourselves cannot be dismissed easily. On the other hand, if we dismiss the idiolect as the interpreted language (and this would involve a dismissal of radical interpretation), it is difficult to see any alternative methodology, if we still would

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[29] Another reason is of course that in Quine's radical translation the situation between linguist and informant is never one of equality. There is no mutual interpretation going on, as in radical interpretation, where both parties could take each other's reactions to a common environment as a possible source for correction of one's own system.

like to endorse interpretationism in epistemology.[30] It seems that we are facing a dilemma, and I suggest that this dilemma is the reason for Davidson's problem with explaining error.

5. The partial solution to the problem of error - Triangulation

In my analysis, I have assumed that Davidson, among other aims, seeks an understanding of the transition from the pre- or non-propositional to the propositional. It seems to me that he wants to understand how the transition can take place, but does not think that we can account for this in detail. He also does not think that we can reduce the propositional to the non-propositional. Still, he has been constantly searching for an explanation of "the origin of, or basis for, the concept of error." [31] In his intellectual autobiography, he says that he eventually found at least a partial solution to the problem. He thinks that reading Kripke's "Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language" may have given rise to the solution, and that one aspect of the problem anyway is stated in that book. "What Kripke saw was that a person cannot make a mistake without an external check, and the inanimate world cannot provide such a check."[32] Based on this, Davidson formed his picture of triangulation, in which two people share visual access to an object or an event, and in which each of them can correlate the other person's reaction to the same object or event to what he or she senses. This will *not*, according to Davidson, give an explanation of error, but triangulation "makes room for it, for there will be cases where one person's reaction to a shared stimulus is not what the other person has come to correlate with that stimulus."[33] This means that an external check could only be made by another person who is also a language user, and thus, that the concept of error relies on a society of language users. Therefore, Davidson's conclusion is that error can only be ascribed and made sense of in interpersonal situations. In triangulation, we find no more and no less than necessary conditions for a concept of error.

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[30] In article 5 I discuss a possible solution for the dilemma, (instead of giving up radical interpretation) where we seem to be able to uphold our interest in truth as well as the methodology of radical interpretation. I think of the suggestion of introducing a third speaker-interpreter.

[31] Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, p. 66.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

Given that we accept propositional thought as language dependent, what more could be said, within Davidson's framework, about the origin of the concept of error? In the theory of radical interpretation, the concerned language is the idiolect. It is hard to see how we could give an account of language as social based on the idiolect and the model of radical interpretation. We can give a story along the lines of disposition plus ostensive language learning in triangulation, but if more is desired in terms of an external explanation of language, I fear that a reduction of intentionality and normativity would be imminent. The reason why we, for the time being, have to confine ourselves to this partial solution, seems to be, on one hand, the mismatch between the idiolect as the language for investigation, and, on the other hand, the necessity of a community-based concept of language as fundamental for a concept of objective truth and a concept of knowledge. [34]

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5. Error and the Teacher-learner-object Triangle

1. The problem

This article concerns the issue of the notion of error in one of the situations described as triangulation in Donald Davidson's writings. The situation in focus typically involves a teacher, a learner and an ordinary middle-sized object. I am approaching the problem of justifying a difference between a learner that *is* aware of the possibility of error and a learner that is *not* aware of the possibility of error. I discuss two suggestions intended to solve some of the problems involved. Davidson has taken up the first of the two suggestions[1], which is that the teacher tripod is to be understood as involving at least two creatures in discussion. The second suggestion is mine, and it is that in order to ascribe thoughts to a creature, the possibility of communicated disagreement is to be counted as a criterion.

In the question of how a difference can *emerge* between being and not being aware of the possibility that one can make mistakes in predication about the world, Davidson points us in the direction of society. He calls our attention to language acquisition, which he talks about as an "intermediate stage" between being and not being in mastery of the distinction between truth and falsity. He emphasizes the fact that when we as children acquire a first language, "society" is our teacher. Through ostensive processes, we learn to connect words and concepts to «normal» objects and events. This situation (and stage) is intermediate, because there is no possibility for learner error when he still cannot fully grasp truth-conditions. This is not to say that error presupposes a grasp of truth-conditions, but if the learner is *aware of* the possibility that something he says can be wrong, he *is* in the grasp of truth-conditions. The awareness of error, then, is rather an indication of such competence than the grasp of truth conditions being a presupposition. Further, considering the stage intermediate does not reduce its importance, on the contrary; if this stage and such a situation are not in the picture, it is very hard to see how a creature can go from acting from dispositions to acting from norms or following rules. Hence, when we become language users, we move on from dispositions to categorizing the world in specific ways, through learning to discriminate through ostension, and towards conceptualization and

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[1] The occasion was his seminar "Truth and Predication" at UC Berkeley in the spring term of 2000.

rule-following. But the transition demands interaction with a linguistic society. This kind of interaction is the subject matter for the triangle with the teacher and the learner.

In this article, I examine the teacher-vertex extensively in order to evaluate the task(s) that is incumbent on it. My line of thought suggests that this vertex seems more static in Davidson's theory than necessary. The teacher sometimes symbolizes the third vertex (in which the speaker and the world is located at the other two vertexes), and, sometimes it is symbolized by the second person, and sometimes by the whole linguistic society. By securing a dynamic and dialogic third vertex, we can further develop the picture of language provided by Davidson's theory.

2. An adequate account of error

Davidson thinks that we lack an account of error, or what he calls "an analysis of the concept of error". In relation to the teacher-learner triangle, he says that: "In the potential gap between how the learner goes on and how the teacher goes on there is room to introduce the idea of error, not only in the mind of the teacher, for we are assuming it is there, but also in the mind of the learner. But how that room gets filled I have not said."[2] We therefore seek an account of error, and, specifically, an "awareness of the possibility of error". The problem we are approaching is; how come that the learner ever gets the idea that error is possible? A counter-question here is why the child couldn't get the idea of error from his mother's corrections of him.[3] I would say that the child would then get an idea that he made a mistake, even if he would not yet himself be able to figure out the norm that his mother was acting from in her corrections. Either way, this would not give the child the distinct idea of error we are concerned with as this kind of response could also give a non-language using creature a feeling that something didn't quite work out well. A dog will not develop *a concept of* error, no matter how often it is being corrected. To turn it on its head, the problem that we are approaching is: How could *the concept of* objective

[2] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 11.
[3] Bjørn Ramberg posed this question on the occasion of my presentation of an earlier version of this article in a Workshop on Davidson and Triangulation in Oslo in 2001.

truth ever dawn on the learner? And, in terms of behavioral confirmation, what would be sufficient evidence for that the learner possesses awareness of the possibility of error?[4]

3. The third person

In the triangular situation with a learner and a teacher, the first of the two suggestions to be discussed is to expand the triangle, or, rather, one of the vertexes in the triangle. The motivation is that this should enable us to see how a learner could get the idea that error is possible, i.e. how a learner could get hold of the distinction between belief and objective truth. A fourth element, a third participant, a teacher number two, in other words, another competent speaker-interpreter, now enters our little society.[5] His or her presence will signify the presence of a "debating society", a society in which different opinions compete.[6] The third participant will then be able to question the first teacher's authority, and this behavior can eventually become the model for the learner. The idea of the possibility of error, mistake or frustration of expectations *could* then dawn on the learner. She or he would learn something more than just how to relate words and world, she or he would also have a model-couple, so as to be able to learn how to be a proper participant in linguistic interaction. Competent speakers in discussion provide a learner with very different and, indeed, more dynamic surroundings than can be provided by an environment with a single teacher.

This "picture" of what it is like to master a language is the picture that Davidson assumes in his general view on language. The pure ostensive process with adequate conditioning that is dominant in the triangle with a learner and only one teacher is not meant to cover the ground, but is construed for making specific points explicit and for testing out specific

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[4] A penultimate problem here is that we need to answer these questions on an empirical (the factuality and psychology of language learning) as well as a theoretical level (the concept of error in the thought experiment of radical interpretation and triangulation).

[5] Davidson discussed the idea of a third person in his seminar "Truth and Predication". It was partly inspired by experiments, whereby psychologists were trying to teach a parrot to talk, and the method was called "the rival-model method". He advised me to try and push his idea further.

[6] Davidson gives a formulation of a scenario with a debating society in "Replies", in Critica 90, 1998, when he says "Seeing rationality in others is a matter of recognizing our own norms of rationality in their speech and behavior. These norms include the norms of logical consistency, of action in reasonable accord with essential or basic interests, and the acceptance of views that are sensible in the light of evidence. *These various norms can suggest conflicting ways of interpreting an agent (for example, there are different things an agent may mean by what she says), and there may be no clear grounds for preferring one of these ways to others.* Hence, balancing the claims of competing norms in interpretation introduces a form of indeterminacy not found in the indeterminacy that abounds in physical measurement." (p. 102, my emphasis.)

ideas. Davidson's general picture of language is a picture in which uncertainties are at home, where fallibility is more obvious, and language is more dynamic and less reified. The picture of competent speakers in discussion is simply a more adequate picture of what it is like to master a language, while the teacher-learner-object triangle is an intermediate stage. Hence, my suggestion introduces fallibility also at the intermediate stage, and I would like to emphasize that even when a child acquires a first language, competing descriptions will be abundant. One of Davidson's motives for bringing in this triangle has been to show the opposite, that the learner does not, and cannot, ascribe error and false belief to the teacher at this stage. The introduction of another teacher may therefore seem destructive in bringing this insight. Either way, the point of launching this suggestion is to investigate into eventual theoretical implications of a second teacher. I will discuss this suggestion in detail after introducing of the second suggestion.

4. Criteria for ascription of propositional attitudes.

On what grounds can we ascribe propositional attitudes to somebody, according to Davidson? On this, in "Rational Animals", Davidson says that full-blown language is required for thought. He says that "...in order to have the concept of belief one must have language"[7] He therefore admits to believe that only language can supply the condition for thought, even though he cannot demonstrate "...that language is necessary to thought."[8] Thus, he *is* saying that language is a reason for ascription of propositional attitudes, but he realizes, of course, that this doesn't help much in explaining thought. This means that thought and language have the same criteria, and we are no better off by saying that language is a criterion for ascription of propositional attitudes.

The first criterion that he mentions, and that he is serious about *as* a criterion (in "Rational Animals") is that for us to be able to "...intelligibly ascribe single beliefs to [somebody], we must be able to imagine how we would decide whether [somebody] has many other beliefs of the kind necessary for making sense of the first."[9] Thus, a first criterion for ascribing a propositional attitude is that a creature can intelligibly be ascribed it *as one*

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[7] Davidson, Donald: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 478.
[8] Ibid, p. 477.
[9] Ibid, p. 475, 'somebody' is being replaced with 'a dog'/'the dog'.

attitude in a *set* of such attitudes, because propositional attitudes "...come only as a matched set."[10], and this set of attitudes is (partly)[11] what makes it possible for anyone to individuate, and therewith, identify, particular attitudes.

Next, Davidson argues that since "...propositional attitudes require a background of beliefs..."[12] he holds that "Without belief there are no other propositional attitudes..." and so he chooses to focus on beliefs when stating conditions for thoughts generally. The next criterion is therefore a criterion for having beliefs, and it says "...in order to have a belief, it is necessary to have the concept of belief."[13] Having the concept of belief could be described as having second-order-beliefs. Hence, possession of second order belief is the second criterion for ascription of a propositional attitude to a creature.

In addition to language, we have so far found two criteria for ascribing propositional attitudes to a creature, whereof the first is that a creature can intelligibly be ascribed a propositional attitude as one attitude in a set of such attitudes, i.e. that the creature *has* a set of attitudes, and the second is that the creature has the concept of belief or that he possesses so-called second-order-beliefs.

In "The Centrality of Truth", Davidson says that: "...we can only say that the child *thinks* something is red, or a ball, if it appreciates the distinction [between success and failure] for itself; the 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

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[10] Ibid. p. 473

[11] As Davidson is hinting at in the end of "Rational Animals", where he introduces the metaphor of triangulation for the first time, and as he goes on to argue more carefully in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", the objects and events that cause a particular belief (or any other attitude) is the other factor that identifies this particular attitude. (Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985 and Donald Davidson: "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1983) pp 307-319 in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore, Blackwell, Oxford 1986) Thus, it is the third point in the triangle (where we; another creature and I, are located as the two other points) that, together with an individuation of a belief as placed in a network of beliefs, can identify a particular attitude. "Since the identity of a thought cannot be divorced from its place in the logical network of other thoughts, it cannot be relocated in the network without becoming a different thought." (P. 475 of "Rational Animals")

[12] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 478.

[13] Ibid.

slot."[14] Davidson describes this as the difference between "conditional response" and "...what Wittgenstein called 'following a rule'". He further notices that "This is where the concept of truth enters, for there is no sense in saying a disposition is in error - one cannot fail to 'follow' a disposition, but one can fail to follow a rule."[15] In effect, a conditional response will be a kind of copying, or "parroting", while if one is following a rule, one is in charge of language, and in charge of the distinction between belief and objective truth. One possesses the *concept* truth. For Davidson, being aware of the possibility of error (and thus having second-order beliefs) means that one is in possession of the concept of truth.[16]

What we have said so far is that only when we can know that a belief (or any other propositional attitude) is involved does the concept of truth have an application. This means we can know that somebody think when they *can* potentially think something that is false, *and* are themselves aware of this possibility. But we have to ask how this can be checked out in terms of behavior. So, this is my second problem. As mentioned earlier, my first problem was: How can the learner get the idea of the possibility of error or the idea of the concept of objective truth? This problem is related to the second problem: how can the difference between being and not being aware of the possibility of error be detected?

5. Disagreement and interpretation - new criteria?

So how could *we* know that *they* know that they can be wrong? Expression of uncertainty, or if they ask us? Typically, the child will look at you with big round eyes, and a questioning expression in his or her face. But could we really say that we know they have propositional content unless they are able to disagree? In the end, I believe that awareness of the possibility of mistake might be insufficient for us to acknowledge others as thinkers and believers; we would perhaps even require that they could produce accounts that compete with our accounts of the world. Thus, that they *at least* are able to disagree with

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[14] Donald Davidson: "The Centrality of Truth" (1996) pp 105-15 in *Truth and its Nature (if any)*, ed. by J. Peregrin, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1999, p. 112.

[15] Ibid.

[16] We could always ask what kind of a concept or notion of truth that is involved when such a connection is being set up. A psychological state is set up as the basis for mastery of a concept. This could imply that the concept of truth has some kind of a naturalistic basis, and that its basis is anyhow not metaphysical. In other connections Davidson's concept of truth could seem to be metaphysical. We can anyhow note that ascription of truth and ascription of conditions, a basic operation in radical interpretation, is not necessarily presupposing a metaphysical concept of truth.

us, but it might be that we would also expect others to be able to give competing accounts. Disagreement and the ability to give competing accounts (or; the ability to independently describe) will then be further criteria for ascription of propositional attitudes to others. It seems to me that when we judge whether or not we can (with reasonableness and an adequate amount of certainty – a question of methodology) ascribe propositional attitudes to specific creatures, the possibility of disagreement, and not only awareness of the possibility of error on their own part, is what we look for.

Davidson says: "...without the exchange of propositional contents, there is no way they can take advantage of their ability to triangulate their shared world."[17] In this case, the 'exchange' of propositional content is assumed mutual. But even if the creatures cannot give their own competing interpretations (which, by definition, is recognized as fallible), there could, according to Davidson, still seem to be a basis for ascribing thoughts to them, on the indication of awareness of error alone. As I see it, the problem is that they wouldn't be able to share their thoughts with us, so how could we know? My suggestion is therefore that the ability to describe and the possibility for ascription of thought coincide in creatures. I think that this suggestion is more Davidsonian in spirit than Davidson's own suggestion.

Even in this case we could ask: What are the basic conditions for disagreement? Are there such conditions, and if so, are they different from the conditions of error? What does it mean to understand disagreement? What are our criteria for being sure that others disagree with us? The answers here may come easy, but also lack explanatory power; when others produce a competing description of the world we know that they disagree.

Is disagreement another criterion, or is it an assumption of "error"? My claim is that if I know that I can be wrong, then I can know that if I say something wrong, you would disagree. And further, if I know that I can disagree with you, this has to do with the fact that you can be wrong. But the possibility of another kind of error (unfortunate use of words or conceptual inadequacy) also exists. Hence, it seems that error and disagreement are connected, in the sense that disagreement depends on the idea of error, but not the other

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[17] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 13.

way around. If an idea of error or mistake did not exist (meaning we had no distinction between truth and falsity), there would not be much sense in an idea of disagreement.

Anyway, this second suggestion is closely related to the suggestion of introducing a fourth "participant" to the triangle. The motivation for this suggestion is that we need to explain how a learner can get his idea of error. Without an idea of the possibility of error, the learner cannot yet be ascribed propositional attitudes (even if more than awareness of error might be needed). As long as the attitude of "holding true" is of such crucial importance in interpretation, and as this again depends on a distinction between belief and truth (so-called "second-order beliefs"), it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it *is* important to be able to explain from where a learner can get the idea of the possibility of error. And I maintain that if a learner only has *one* teacher to rely on, he or she will, in general, hold the teacher infallible; and hence, the learner might understand that something he or she said was mistaken without getting a specific grip on what is going on, and without getting hold of a distinction between belief and objective truth. With two potentially disagreeing teachers present, the idea of the possibility of error will have its obvious source. Another advantage is that our theory of thought and knowledge will be empirically trustworthier.

The disadvantages of both suggestions are numerous. A fourth element makes our theory more complicated; we are bringing an additional participant into *one* of the situations we call triangulation – will we have to rename the whole ting? This objection can be easily met by assuming that one of the vertexes of the triangle represents society, and not specifically one single person. This assumption coheres with Davidson's many statements about the role of the second person, and so the second person doesn't literally have to be *one* person. Indeed, it seems that in this situation it *could not* be one person, and this might be the case also in other triangular situations. If our aim is to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for thought and language, another serious implication is whether this suggestion supplies more than we need. Might we risk giving more than what we minimally need when it comes to our theoretical use of the teacher-learner-triangle? There is a question as to whether we could end up with an unnecessary complicated theory.

But the demand on ascribing attitudes only to creatures that are potentially able to disagree with us seems to solve some problems. We had the problem that we didn't know how we

could ascertain whether the other creature possessed awareness of the possibility of error.[18] If we set the criterion to be the possibility of disagreement instead, it is a stronger demand, but easier to know whether or not it is fulfilled; the other creature has to be able to produce a disagreement. We avoid the uncertainty about whether the learner is only parroting or if she or he is in charge of the norms. That also Davidson is concerned with this question of (what he calls) "observable behavioral fallout", is rather obvious from his generally Quinean methodological ideal. A disagreement would undoubtedly be classified as observable behavioral fallout. In "Externalisms" he talks about observable behavioral fallouts and criteria for knowing whether a creature is merely aping or not, and mentions that: "…one such fallout is willingness to change one's mind (and therefore what one says), not because one differs from others, but because the change fits in with further observations."[19] This is a description of an advanced and mature language user, and if we can observe and understand another creature's change of mind, this indicates that there is a propositional content in this mind, and thus, we can assume that he is in charge of the concept of error. This criterion or fallout is then certainly not as minimal as the criterion of communication. If we ask why we need to know whether or not the other creature has an awareness of the possibility of error in the first place, one of Davidson's reasons is that "It takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of a thought, and thus to define its content".[20] Hence, determination of content is one of the reasons for the need to decide whether or not the other creature has an awareness of error.

Another, and perhaps even more underlying motive for establishing a criterion, is to be found in the insight that, according to Davidson, there is no point in saying that neither another creature's thought *nor one's own thoughts* have propositional content, unless we can communicate. "Until a base line has been established by communication with someone else, there is no point in saying one's own thoughts or words have a propositional content."[21] We also need to have knowledge of the propositional contents of our own minds in order to ascribe thoughts to others. There is, then, a reciprocal dependency

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[18] This problem arises in the context of the methodology of radical interpretation, where we are supposed to start out from something non-semantic and end with something semantic.

[19] In Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 9.

[20] Donald Davidson: "Three Varieties of Knowledge", in Davidson: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 212f.

[21] Ibid, p. 213.

between knowledge of our own minds and knowledge of the minds of others. We depend on other minds that are propositionally structured, and Davidson would grant that it is important that we can know that the other creature has an awareness of the possibility of error. But, as I see it, the problem is that we would be able to *communicate* with another creature, and he or she could still potentially lack an awareness of the possibility of error. Thus, the criterion of communication that Davidson has suggested might be too weak to satisfy our needs.

6. Concluding remarks.

Firstly, my suggestion has been to expand our triangle with a fourth "element" in the case of the triangular situation of language-acquisition. This fourth element will be another competent speaker-interpreter, a second teacher that symbolizes the society of "debating" participants. This extension is found non-threatening to the metaphor of a triangle and triangulation as such, as "the second person" is intended to symbolize society. If we decide to go for an "extended triangle", so that, in the case of language acquisition, the tripod consists of more than one person, what about the other triangular situations, especially the situation of symmetrical linguistic competence? The reliance on "the second person" symbolizes the dialectic feature of thought, and creatures in discussion and a debating society are already present in the metaphor of triangulation. The triangle of symmetric linguistic competence, as I have suggested, is already "extended" in the sense that we extended the triangle with a teacher and a learner.

The related, and second, suggestion is that the possibility of disagreement is to be counted as a criterion for ascription of thoughts to a creature. This will make it possible for us to effectively discern parroting from rule following and we will have a situation that can be easily handled when it comes to deciding whether or not a creature is a rule-follower.

Both suggestions point in the direction of a more thorough dialectical or dialogical understanding of thought and language. They point in a direction where we can see that when we communicate, we both exercise *and* form language and thought. In my opinion, this is not a contrast to Davidson's views; rather, it is a question of taking one more step in the direction Davidson was heading. What we still have *not* obtained, of course, is an

account that can *explain* normativity from the outside; we are still looking at it from the perspective of the radical interpretation participants.[22]

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6. Ascription of Belief and Second Order Belief

Davidson holds that having beliefs about beliefs is a necessary condition for having the concept of belief at all. In this view, the existence of second order beliefs, or generally, higher order thoughts, is a condition for the existence of first order beliefs. In effect, this means that in order to know that a belief of mine is a belief, I must be aware of the fact that my belief might be false. In this way, the conceptual difference between 'belief' and 'truth' is something that we can get from a reflection on the concept of belief itself. Davidson even claims to have drawn a concept of *objective* truth partly from such reflections, and objective truth is therefore being constituted partly from within the sphere of intentionality. This means that by showing the internal relations between intentional concepts (such as belief, belief about belief, truth, and error) Davidson gives meaning to these concepts. Hence, according to Davidson, objective truth relies partly on our ability to think about our own thoughts. Our subjective judgment of the relative probabilities of our own beliefs thus partly constitutes objective truth.

From what or where could we have started when drawing the line from second-order beliefs to the concept of objective truth? Our starting point is a frame of interpretation, in which language is seen as a means of communication.[1] In this frame, language is about communicating thoughts, and understanding is the goal of communication. When we make an attempt to communicate some propositional content to someone, we want to be understood. Therefore, we employ whichever words (and other means) considered necessary to achieve understanding. In addressing us, we assume that the other party has a similar aim. When we try to understand the verbal behavior of others, we assume that they have some propositional content in the form of beliefs, wishes, and other attitudes that they want us to know about. Similarly, when we want to rationalize our own verbal (and other) activity, we ascribe propositional attitudes to ourselves. In short, ascription of propositional attitudes is acts of interpretation. Thus, "interpretationism" is an enlightening description

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[1] I here consider communication to be distinct from language. Even if language is first and foremost a vehicle of communication, this is not to say that all there is to communication is language.

of this view of truth, knowledge, thought and language. [2] I will give a brief account of Davidson's interpretational frame, or "method".

Davidson's version of interpretationism is based on a thought experiment named "radical interpretation". The point of this exercise of thought is to establish what an interpreter needs to know (and how he could come to know this) to understand a speaker of an alien language. The radical interpreter deals with an unknown speaker and his environment, and the interpreter only has to be able to recognize the speaker's attitude of "holding true" (meaning "believing"). Based on this, the interpreter is assumed able to form a theory about the speaker's beliefs ("What are his beliefs?") and meanings ("What does his sentences mean?"). A central tool for the interpreter is the principle of charity, by which the interpreter presuppose that the speaker speaks the truth and also that the speaker is consistent. The principle enables the interpreter to hold "beliefs constant as far as possible while solving for meaning".[3] This means that the interpreter, based on his own system of beliefs and sparse evidence about the speaker's beliefs, goes on to form hypotheses about the speaker's meanings. These hypotheses about meaning again contribute to new hypotheses about the beliefs of the speaker, and so the process of interpretation goes back and forth.

Davidson assumes that the speaker and the interpreter have a common biological basis in the form of dispositions for categorizing the world in similar ways. The pillars that support the interpretational platform are hence these common dispositions, the shared physical environment, the interpreter's ability to recognize when the speaker holds a sentence true, and the interpreter's assumptions of the truthfulness and consistency of the speaker. In Davidson's approach, this process, in which the interpreter and the speaker meet in a common environment, is called "triangulation". The notion of triangulation hints at the

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[2] Bill Child has employed this terms in his description of an approach to mental phenomena generally, where it is assumed that we can reach an understanding of the nature of the propositional attitudes "by reflection on the procedure for interpreting a subject's attitudes and language", p 1. in William Child: *Causality, Interpretation and the Mind*, Oxford University Press, 1994. For a key expression of the view, he refers to Davidson's claim that "What a fully informed interpreter could learn about what a speaker means is all there is to learn; the same goes for what the speaker believes", and, Child adds, "and desire". (Ibid) Child thus mentions Davidson, but also Dennett as representatives of this tradition, and holds that there is a strong Wittgensteinian strand to the view.

[3] Donald Davidson: "Radical Interpretation" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984, p. 137.

three vertexes: the interpreter, the speaker, and the world. According to Davidson, the world consists of "objects, properties and events that the creatures can discriminate in perception."[4] There are casual connections between the world and the speaker, the world and the interpreter, the speaker and the interpreter, and the interpreter and the speaker. This means that the interpreter perceives the relevant aspects of the world and he perceives the speakers linguistic reactions to the relevant aspects of the world. When the interpreter then ascribes a belief to the speaker, he has correlated these two causal connections; he has been looking for relevant similarity between his own response to the world and the other speaker's response. Based on the interpreter's own system of beliefs, he interprets the speaker's utterance to have a specific meaning and ascribes a certain belief to the speaker.[5] This means that a belief (and belief content), as well as a meaning of a sentence, according to this version of interpretationism, is constituted in triangulation.[6] In this way, the basis for this constitution is social, or specifically, intersubjective, and as such, the process of triangulation is considered to generate hypotheses about beliefs that stem directly from the world that they are about. In this sense, belief content is objective, and objective truth, then, partly dependent on triangulation in interpretation. But this external side of the constitution of a notion of objective truth will not be the focus of this article; the subject is second order belief and the possibility of an internal constitution of a notion of objective truth on basis of this.

An interpretational frame for a study of belief and knowledge is by no means self-evident. I will, however, not discuss this frame in relation to other alternatives here. And likewise, without discussion, I assume that interpretation means ascription of attitudes. What is required for having propositional attitudes? To whom can we ascribe attitudes? I start by presenting Davidson's four criteria for ascription of attitudes, and thus for interpretation, and I discuss some of my observations of related problems. I pay particular attention to

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[4] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 4.
[5] This will typically go both ways, such that both creatures in triangulation are speaker-interpreters.
[6] The mentioned factors of triangulation: coherentism, causality through social externalism and perceptual externalism, and an evolutionary biological basis, are all seen as elements in a unified approach. I have argued in article 3 that this is Davidson's view, and it seems to me that many of his commentators have overlooked someone or other of these factors. The social and the biological have in most of the history of philosophy been seen as opposing areas, as in e.g. asking about whether there is a cultural OR a natural basis for action. Likewise, the causal and the intentional have been considered separate, as in the Kantian distinction between the realm of necessities and the realm of freedom, respectively.

Davidson's notion of belief. Next, I discuss in detail the status of second-order beliefs (which is one of the criteria) within Davidson's theory. We need to question the 'foundational' merit of second-order beliefs in this respect as the notion is essential to our understanding of intentionality, especially in a process of co-constituting a notion of objective truth from the inside; indeed, we could even claim that the notion of objective truth hinges on it. The existence of second order belief as a presupposition for having beliefs has been challenged by research on autism. It has been suggested that some autistic speakers represent a counter example to some of Davidson's claims. I argue against this suggestion and I discuss the consequences of considering, or not considering, second order beliefs a prerequisite. Finally, I briefly consider the question of a possible tension between interpretationism and naturalism in epistemology.

1. Propositional attitudes comes in sets

In "Rational Animals" Davidson's first criterion for ascription of the attitude of belief is that for us to be able to "...intelligibly ascribe single beliefs to [somebody], we must be able to imagine how we would decide whether [this somebody] has many other beliefs of the kind necessary for making sense of the first."[7] Thus, a first criterion for ascription of a propositional attitude is the criterion that a creature can intelligibly be ascribed an attitude *as one attitude* in a *set* of such attitudes. The reason for this is that the propositional attitudes according to Davidson "...come only as a matched set"[8] Such a set of attitudes is (partly) what makes it possible for anyone to individuate, and therewith, identify, a particular attitude. "Since the identity of a thought cannot be divorced from its place in the logical network of other thoughts, it cannot be relocated in the network without becoming a different thought."[9] I believe that this point is fairly straightforward, at the least as a methodological principle.

As Davidson suggests towards the end of "Rational Animals", in which he mentions the metaphor of triangulation for the first time, and as he goes on to argue more carefully in "A

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[7] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 475, 'somebody' is replacing 'a dog'/'the dog'
[8] Ibid. p. 473.

Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", the objects and events that cause a particular belief, or any other attitude, is the other factor that plays a part in identifying this particular attitude. It is therefore the third point in a triangle (where we; another creature and I, are located at the two other points) that, together with an individuation of a belief as placed in a network of beliefs, can identify a particular attitude. This bipartite dependence on a set of attitudes (holism) and causally effective objects and events (causality) for the identification of a particular attitude is of crucial importance to Davidson's theory. None of these parts can be missing, even if we sometimes are close up to, sometimes far from being actually confronted with the whole system of attitudes as well as with the actual cause, insofar as that is possible.[10] Anyway, if we overlook either of these parts, the result will be a misreading of Davidson. I have elsewhere argued that McDowell has presented us with one such misreading in his *Mind and World*, where he sees Davidson's philosophy as coherentism at the risk of being out of touch with reality.[11]

But what is the actual argument behind this first criterion; that attitudes come only in matched sets? There are at least two different claims involved here; first, that we cannot *know* that another creature has one single particular propositional attitude at all unless he has several, and second, that the other cannot *have* one single particular propositional attitude, unless he has several. The effect is in both cases that he and we cannot *identify* a singular particular attitude in him unless he has several attitudes. This could be taken to mean that Davidson is claiming that what can be known for an interpreter is all there can *be*, while only having argumentative resources for the first, epistemic claim (that we cannot have access to a single particular attitude unless the creature has several), and not for the second, ontological claim. Holism about propositional attitudes as an epistemological presumption is not the same as holism about attitudes as an ontological presumption. I would suggest that we restrict ourselves to the epistemic claim from a third person point of view, as our argument here stretches no further. This amounts to a methodologically based restriction, and I consider this unproblematic and non-controversial.

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[9] Ibid, p. 475.
[10] When I say, "insofar as that is possible", I think of the claim that, in many cases, it is not possible to really say that one object is the cause of a belief. Rather, several objects and events or even the whole causal chain must be said to be responsible for causing a belief.

2. Beliefs occupy a certain position among the attitudes

Next, Davidson argues that since "...propositional attitudes require a background of beliefs..."[12] he holds that "Without belief there are no other propositional attitudes..."[13] and he focuses on beliefs when stating conditions for the existence of thoughts in general. This means that the existence of beliefs in a creature is a general condition for ascription of *any* propositional attitude to the creature. Davidson thus assumes that beliefs are prior to the other attitudes in some kind of way. If we think of beliefs in relation to desires, denials, intentions, hopes, fears and wishes, we would have to ask: what is it that makes beliefs so special? Let's grapple this by asking what a belief is according to Davidson.

A belief is a sentence held true by someone who understands it. [14]

Beliefs are states in creatures with intentions, desires, wishes and sense organs.[15]

Beliefs are not internal states that only the person that has them can know about. If beliefs didn't have an external basis, we could never know, and not even make sense of, that another person held a particular belief.

Beliefs are states that are caused by internal and external perceptions[16], but these perceptions can never be evidence for the beliefs. A causal explanation can never show that or why a belief is justified.[17]

Beliefs are states that cause events inside and outside the bodies of their entertainers.[18]

Beliefs come in sets, not one by one, or else they couldn't be identified.[19] Radical incoherence in a set of beliefs is impossible because of internal dependencies among the beliefs.[20]

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[11] In article 2 I argue that the reason for this misconstruction is Mc Dowell's insensitivity to the importance of the social constitution of knowledge, via the social location of the objects and events that causes our beliefs. See article 2 and John McDowell: *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1994.

[12] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 478.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Donald Davidson: "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford 2001, p. 138. Or also, sentences held true are "the linguistic representatives of belief" ("The Method of Truth in Metaphysics", (1977) pp 199-214 in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984, p. 201)

[15] "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", p. 138 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford 2001

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, p. 143.

[18] Ibid, p. 138.

[19] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals", pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 475.

A belief is given its content by one's knowledge of what is required for the belief to be true. Since beliefs and truth are related in this way, belief can serve as the human attitude that connects a theory of truth to human concerns.[21]

This list, which is meant to be relevant to our questions and not exhaustive, gives us more than a hint yet not a complete overview of what a Davidsonian belief is. The notion of belief is different from "platonist" conceptions of notions like proposition, statement, judgment, mental content or propositional content. When entertaining a platonist notion of proposition one assumes that the content of each proposition is objective and eternal, and that we display this content (or a "copy" of it) when we utter an instantiation of it in the form of a grammatical unit. The point here is that the propositional content (the content of the statement, or the mental content) is seen as fixed once and for all, and it is considered more basic than the "instantiations" of it, so that one may ask whether or not it has been correctly represented by the instantiations. Davidsonian beliefs are definitely nothing like this. Indeed, the contents of beliefs can be instantiated in a variety of sentences, but there is no common stock of fixed beliefs in which we can find the authoritative versions for comparison. As the radical interpreter has his own system of beliefs to rely on in interpretation, this is the closest we come to a store. But it is not authoritative in the sense of being universal or eternal. But, on the other hand, we *can* assume that *most* of the interpreter's beliefs are true, due to the way in which the beliefs were constituted. According to Davidson, beliefs are being constituted intersubjectively, based on the common physical surroundings. But beliefs are still hypothetical. A belief about the world is a hypothesis about the world, and the hypothetical relation to the world is a characteristic feature of Davidson's epistemological thinking, a part of his Quinean heritage. One of the otherwise most important differences between the notion of proposition of the analytic tradition and the notion of belief addressed here is that the belief is always related to a

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[20] Ibid, and in "Afterthoughts", p. 155 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford 2001. Or, as Davidson puts it in a reply to Carol Rovane in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999: "Thoughts belongs to the domain of rationality. This is because thoughts () have, as we say, propositional contents. They therefore have logical relations. We cannot entertain any arbitrary collection of thoughts; logic constrains us. This... is due to the fact that the company in part determines the contents of thoughts they keep, and enough of this company must be logically congenial to confer a particular content on a thought. This is the sense in which I have meant that rationality is constitutive of thought." (p. 480)

[21] Donald Davidson: "Epistemology and Truth" (1988) pp 177-191 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford 2001, p. 189.

believer and his system of beliefs. The notion of belief is therefore, in a way, relational.[22] We are personally connected to the belief-contents that we entertain. Our different beliefs have a specific subjective probability for us, and our attitudes to our own beliefs can vary a lot. However, some of our perceptual beliefs about the most familiar middle-sized objects usually have less room for probability variation than many of our other beliefs. A personal relation to a belief-content is necessary for something to be a belief; a person has to both understand the belief-content and hold it true, for something to *be* a belief. It is yet not private, as it has a linguistic representative; it has a sentence as its representative. Hence, a belief is propositionally structured, and it is publicly accessible.

Davidson's characteristics of beliefs constitute a truly amazing achievement as he manages to bridge the presumed gap between "subjective minds" and "objective world". This is done in such a way that the subjectivity of mind and belief as mental content is preserved; while at the same time the objectivity of the world and the objectivity of the belief as sentence is intact. This analysis also provides a demonstration of the claim that we are directly influenced by the world;[23] there is no filter between linguistic minds and non-linguistic world.[24] Yet, according to Davidson, language is the "...main entry into the mind".[25] This suggests that belief is of crucial importance to interpretationism as it operates at the joints of subjects, language and world.

What would be different if we chose to let, say, the "propositions" or the "contents" of other people rather than their beliefs be the feature that we were trying to get a hold of when aiming at understanding? When we aim to understand other people in ordinary attribution of intentional states, we are after the person's own attitudes, that is, his attitudes as he holds them from his own perspective. The subjective relation of probability that a speaker has towards his own attitudes would be lost if we chose to focus on a Platonist notion of proposition instead of the notion of belief. And then we, as interpreters, would

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[22] Jan Harald Alnes made me aware of this difference between the proposition and the belief, and I have adopted his characterization of the belief.

[23] See e.g. Davidson's "Seeing Through Language", p. 20, in *Philosophy: the Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1997, "...language is not something that comes between us and reality".

[24] Besides, we should note that society and we ourselves exercises a pressure on our belief-system, through constant corrections that more or less lead to revisions. This can explain why conversation is so favorable to us. Second-order belief is important in order to be able to revise our belief-systems.

[25] Comment in seminar, UCB, April 31. 2000.

also loose what we were after. What we *are* after is to understand the other. We want to understand his or her interests, actions and orientation, and it is then inevitable that we take his or her beliefs into account, because beliefs are relational in the sense that they need a subject. A person's own assessment of the belief-contents is constitutive of what a belief is.

Now, let's take a closer look at the background for saying that beliefs are special *among the attitudes*. Davidson holds that all the other propositional attitudes depend for their "particularity on a similar world of beliefs. In order to believe the cat went up the oak tree, I must have many true beliefs about cats and trees, this cat and this tree, the place, appearance and habits of cats and trees, and so on; but the same holds if I wonder whether the cat went up the oak tree, fear that it did, hope that it did, wish that it had, or intend to make it do so. Belief – indeed, true belief – plays a central role among the propositional attitudes."[26] It is apparent that Davidson's focus is on *true* belief as particularly central. But this is still not an explanation, nor even a rationalization, of why beliefs are special *among the attitudes*. We might think that what he says in this quote is not very different from saying that truth plays a special role, and that is not unreasonable, but it's not what we are after here. We should notice that Davidson also says: "...beliefs demand other basic attitudes such as intentions, desires..."[27] and so it seems as though the dependence-relation between beliefs and the other attitudes goes both ways. Later in "Rational Animals", he repeats the point that beliefs are special among the propositional attitudes: "I think I have shown that all the propositional attitudes require a background of beliefs..."[28] But all that he has given in this article are the aforementioned quotes, and they contain the statement that there is a particular dependency, but no argument for it. And so, even though I think that Davidson is right, and even though we know that according to Davidson the ability to recognize the attitude of holding true is vital for the radical interpreter and thus that the belief in this sense is the starting point for radical interpretation, it doesn't seem that Davidson here has shown either *that* or *why* "all the propositional attitudes require a background of belief". At the least he has not shown this any more than he has shown that beliefs also require a background of other propositional attitudes.

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[26] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 475.
[27] Ibid, p. 473.
[28] Ibid, p. 478.

One of the reasons that the attitude of belief is of such unique standing to Davidson is that it is the notion that takes the place of the fregean thought or conceptual content, and the place of the russellian proposition, and even the place of the Quinean (in comparison to these two, very de-metaphysicalized notion of) sentence. It is also reasonable to claim that the notions of assertion and predication have its "replacement" in Davidson's notion of belief. The reason for the focus on such a notion in the first place is deeply connected to our human interest in the world, our human interest in other humans and to our human interest in truth. The thought, proposition, statement, assertion or predication has been considered subject to truth validation or rejection. Moreover, it is assumed that a person who entertains these entities considers them true. The prevailing entity has been deemed to be about the world, and has been considered to have the potential of being either true or false. The evaluative force of the entity is considered the reason for its potential to have a given truth-value. The entity is often considered to be a judgment, and in its typical form it is an indicative sentence, a description.

Davidson relates to the tradition within analytic philosophy, and seems concerned with keeping up the dialogue, perhaps unlike Quine. Quine's break with the tradition is more radical, and he is happy to confine himself to the sentence. Davidson seems to be after the same as was Frege with his thought and Russell with his proposition. According to Davidson's theory, a belief can be true or false. When somebody entertains it in the form of an assertion, he or she represents him or herself as believing it, and hence assumes it true. If one knows the belief's truth requirements, one knows the belief's content. The belief's truth conditions are thus the conditions under which we can recognize the belief, but it is also required that the belief is a part of a network of beliefs in order for us to identify it. Within radical interpretation, identification of belief is, and has to be, accompanied by identification of meaning, and we need to solve for both at the same time.[29] Davidson's theory of meaning for a speaker is based on assent to sentences that are caused by events in the world, and the theory of meaning is in this way also a theory of belief for the speaker. This is so because when we can interpret a speaker's sentence that he, based on an intersubjectively available event holds true, then we have identified one of his beliefs.

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[29] I have elsewhere given an account of the early phases of radical interpretation and the weighing of belief and meaning by use of the principle of charity, see article 3.

The notion of belief was obviously a key notion in Davidson's early theory of interpretation, and still is, even if the notions of intention, desire, wish and the other attitudes are of equal standing in his unified theory of language, action and value. After the extension of the theory of interpretation, it would be reasonable to confine to the claim that a creature that possesses one kind of propositional attitude also possesses other kinds of attitudes. However, it is obvious that *true belief* plays a very central role among the attitudes. It is true belief that connects us to the world. I also happily succumb to the claim that *perceptual belief* plays a particular role in connection to this.

3. Second order beliefs

The third criterion for interpretation is a criterion for having beliefs, and it says "…in order to have a belief, it is necessary to have the concept of belief."[30] Having second order beliefs, according to Davidson, is thus (as noted in the introduction of this article) a criterion for having the concept of a belief, which again is a criterion for being attributed the ability to think and for having language in general. Davidson's claim is that in order to be a "qualified" speaker, you have to understand what it means to have a belief, and basically, I think Davidson is right in holding that the ability to have beliefs about beliefs normally will be co-occurring with the ability to speak a language. Research on autism, however, suggests the existence of speakers who are unable to ascribe false beliefs to themselves and other people.[31]

It is a common trait for autistic individuals that they take all sentences to express literal meaning (they cannot, for instance, conceive linguistic jokes or irony), and when tested in so-called false belief tests, the majority of persons with autism fail to pass the tests.[32] The

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[30] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 478.

[31] In my account of this research I base myself mainly on Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin's "Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers" in *Mind and Language*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-51, 2003. Not only do they give an impressive overview of the research, they also discuss some of the central implications for philosophy of mind and language.

[32] One of the standard tests is a change-in-location false-belief task, which is often called the Sally-Anne test. A child is presented with the puppets Sally and Anne, where Sally has a basket and Anne has a box. Sally puts a marble into her basket and she then leaves the room. Then Anne takes the marble from the basket and puts it into her own box. When Sally comes back she wants her marble. The child will now be asked where Sally think her marble is, and also where Sally will look for it. If the child then answers that Sally will think the

tests are designed to find out whether the test-person understands that a belief (of him- or herself or another person) can be false. The reason why false belief has been of interest in cognitive psychology is that they are crucial in testing so called so-called "theory of mind theories" or "mindblindness theories" of autism. It has generally been assumed that the tests will be vital in perceiving how much of the autistic person's linguistic and communicative deficits can be understood and explained by the theory, and it is assumed that false-belief tests indicate the ability to "read" the minds of others. [33] In this connection Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin point out that: "To understand the difference between being true and being believed to be true, one must understand that a belief can be false, and this understanding is manifested by means of the ability to ascribe beliefs one takes to be false."[34] The fact that persons with autism consistently fail the tests is considered an indication that autistic individuals lack, or have a seriously impaired, capacity for thinking about thoughts. For our particular context, this also seems to provide empirical evidence that suggests an impaired capacity to understand what it is to have a belief (and other intentional concepts) in these speakers. Hence, they do not have "the concept of belief" in Davidson's sense. Autistic individuals do have general communication problems, or rather; a problem with communication is a key diagnostic criterion for autism.[35] This involves poor interpretational abilities and the autistic individual is generally unable to see another person as an intentionally determined subject. They have problems taking the other person's point of view; particularly, when a speaker's utterances are not meant literally, they are unable to take clues from the context to interpret the utterances. Yet, some of these individuals are able to express themselves creatively; they have generative capacity, which means that they can produce and understand new sentences, they are able to communicate by means of language and will by all means qualify as speakers. Given that the description

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marble is in her basket, or also that Sally will look in her basket, this will be the correct answer. This answer will involve ascription of a false belief to Sally and a prediction that Sally will act on the false belief. According to acknowledged tests 85 % of non-autistic 4-year-olds pass the test, while only 20 % of children with autism do. This account of the test leans heavily on Glüer and Pagin, Ibid, note 8, p. 27, and Janet W. Astington and Jennifer M. Jenkins: "A Longitudinal Study of the Relation Between Language and Theory-of-Mind Development", in *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 35, No. 5, pp. 1311-1320, 1999.

[33] The tendency in newer literature on false belief tests and theory of mind is that there is no reason to identify a failed false belief-test with a lack of a theory of mind. One might have an otherwise well developed reading of other minds and still fail the test, for several other reasons.

[34] Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin "Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers" in *Mind and Language*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-51, 2003, p. 27.

[35] Uta Frith and Francesca Happé in "Language and communication in autistic disorders" in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, Series B, 346, pp 97-104, London, 1994.

of this group of autistic speakers so far is correct, the question for us is whether or not they represent a counter-example to Davidson's theory. But before we examine this matter in detail, let's have a brief look at Davidson's last criterion for interpretation.

4. Language, the ultimate criterion?

Davidson argues that "in order to have the concept of belief one must have language."[36] This is thus his fourth criterion for ascription of propositional attitudes to somebody. Davidson admits that he doesn't have a waterproof argument for his claim that language is the ultimate criterion for distinguishing between creatures with thoughts and creatures without thoughts. He says that all he has is some basis for a suggestion that "...there probably can't be much thought without language"[37] and I take it that the term "thought" should (or at the least could) be understood as "propositional thought". Given the interpretational frame this could be read as the modest claim that we cannot *grasp* or have access to the thoughts of another creature unless he or she has language, or it could be read as an empirical or ontological claim. Either way, it is probably fair to assume that propositional thought demands language. What seems to be beyond doubt is that the fairly sophisticated concept of belief that Davidson is talking about actually could be found only in creatures with a full-fledged language. As I have done before, I would stick to the more modest epistemological or methodological version of interpretationism in this particular situation, and interpret Davidson's fourth criterion as saying that we cannot *have access to* the propositional thoughts of another creature unless he or she has language. Hence, I would not read his claim as a claim about the ontology of mind. But now, let's go into the question of the merits of second order belief, and the proposed empirical refutation of the third criterion for interpretation.

5. Beliefs Without Second Order Beliefs?

Glüer and Pagin argue that speakers who lack the capacity of thinking about thoughts are counter-examples to some of Davidson's claims. In particular, they argue that Davidson's

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[36] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 478.
[37] Ibid, p. 477.

claim that "one cannot have beliefs at all unless one has the concept of objective truth" has its counterexample in a group of autistic speakers. In the same connection they also mention the Davidsonian claim about second order belief that "no one believes anything who does not grasp the concept of belief".[38] When they point out that there are persons with autism who "combine a sufficient degree of linguistic ability to be regarded as language users with a seriously impaired capacity for higher-order thoughts"[39] Glüer and Pagin seems to take 'sufficient degree of linguistic ability to be regarded as language users' and Davidson's utterances about 'having beliefs' to be interchangeable terms here. And that may well be correct. We do have quite detailed information about Davidson's idea of what it is to have beliefs. And having beliefs in Davidson's sense certainly demands "a sufficient degree of linguistic ability to be regarded as (a) language user(s)". Davidson has also gone far in the direction of reversing the order by admitting that "communication in the full linguistic sense" will suffice as a basis for belief.[40] But the question is whether Glüer and Pagin's concept of belief and the concept of belief involved in empirical psychology is the same as Davidson's concept.

Davidson's concept of belief is not just any concept of belief. The concept is defined in relation to a cluster of other intentional concepts,[41] and it is also marked by its role within the methodology of radical interpretation. Therefore, this concept of belief is to some extent technical, or quasi-technical. In Davidson's sense, a belief has a propositional structure and can be stated in the form of a sentence. A belief can only be found in creatures with other identifiable propositional attitudes like intentions and desires and wishes and other beliefs, and to whom we can ascribe *an awareness of* the possibility of false belief. Beliefs in Davidson's sense are caused by perceptions and they are themselves causally effective. Beliefs can be justified only by other beliefs, not by something in the world, and the contents of beliefs are given by its truth conditions. But, and this vital: beliefs are hypothetical. I said earlier that a belief about the world is a hypothesis about the world. As such, we do not take all of our beliefs to be equally probable. We frequently

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[38] Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin's "Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers" in *Mind and Language*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-51, 2003, note 5, p. 25.
[39] Ibid, p. 25.
[40] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 480.

assess and re-assess our attitudes towards our beliefs. It is apparent that Davidson's concept of belief is a distinctly theoretical term, and, on a number of issues, non-neutral. This is not to say that the characteristic features that we in this case associate with belief is incompatible with an innocent (what ever that may be) or non-technical notion of belief, but the features in question are certainly more specific and specified than what we would expect of a definition of the notion in a dictionary.[42]

Now, we could question the methodology of radical interpretation and refuse to accept an interpretationist notion of belief. Even if we would question the particular methodology of radical interpretation, and the investments in the concept of belief following from it, I would hold that some of the characteristic features of the concept, as Davidson presents it, cover common intuitions. In particular, I am thinking about the insight that an explanation of the notion of 'belief' that does *not* involve a contrast to the notion of 'truth' is inadequate. I will argue that anyone who reflects on the notion of belief will come to contrast it with a notion of truth. I think that this part of Davidson's notion of belief (which is one of the traits of the notion stemming from participation in the cluster of inter-defined intentional concepts) is widely supported.

On the other hand, we could choose to say, more bluntly, that any speaker who does not have second-order belief is not a full-fledged speaker, that he is not a speaker in Davidson's meaning of the word or that he hasn't got a language in the strict sense, or in Davidson's sense. On this basis we could refuse to accept the autistic speaker as a proper speaker. This would, however, come close to saying that our theory or thesis is immune to empirical counterexamples. But then it could be feared that our philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of belief only covers a concept of belief relevant to a closed circuit of intentional concepts. A conceptual analysis of the relations within such a circuit will by no means be uninteresting or irrelevant. But the empirical phenomenon of belief might then have to be left to the empirical psychologists and others to study. In that case, we would

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[41] Jan Harald Alnes has persistently argued this point to me, and it took some time before I realized its impact on false-belief-tests as possible counter-examples to Davidson's thesis.

[42] Similarly is there a reason to assume that the concept of belief employed in empirical psychology will have some theoretical ballast and it is also reasonable to assume that the concept involved in the tests is marked by its role in the experiment situation. I am however not sufficiently familiar with the literature to give an account of the exact features of that concept here.

have to ask in what sense Davidson's study of knowledge, and an interpretational approach in epistemology in general, could be a specimen of naturalized epistemology. Radical Interpretation is admittedly a thought-experiment, and a conceptual exercise, but a claim to empirical immunity could make it a less interesting alternative as a frame for an understanding of human belief and knowledge.

According to Glüer and Pagin the question of whether there in fact are speakers of the kind in question is an empirical question.[43] However, they admit that it is "not straightforwardly empirical, since some conceptual care is needed in the evaluation of the evidence". I find it a bit surprising that they think of "conceptual care" only "in the evaluation of evidence" and not also in the involved key concepts themselves. In fact, they refrain from discussing the concept of belief, or the possible differences in the concepts of belief employed by the different philosophers and psychologists involved in their article. The reason might be that they want to keep the field together in this way, and that they assume the concept of belief to be the same throughout, in order to be able to show the effects of this move. But they don't explicitly say that this is what they aspire to do.

Could autistic persons become competent speakers by learning to speak in an environment with only autistic people? If this much could have been demonstrated, we would, perhaps, have a convincing counter-example to the thesis that the existence of second order belief is a criterion for ascription of propositional attitudes to somebody. If non-autistic speakers have introduced autistic persons to language (which I presume is the more common case) the autistic individual certainly will have profited from the non-autistic speaker's capacity for higher order thought. Is it likely that the autistic person could be a speaker at all if this was not the case? Research on autistic disorders does show that well-enough-qualified speakers that don't have higher order thoughts exist. However, this is not the same as showing that speakers in general do not need this capability for there to be "ordinary" linguistic activity going on. Another way of phrasing this point is to say that the deviant linguistic behavior (as shown by some autistic persons) is parasitic upon "ordinary" linguistic behavior, i.e. behavior that presupposes and includes second-order beliefs. Of

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[43] Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin: "Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers" in *Mind and Language*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-51, 2003, p. 25.

course this is true also of non-autistic children up to a certain stage. The difference between some autistic persons and non-autistic kids will, however, be that non-autistic kids will develop second-order beliefs if their language learning proceeds in ordinary fashion, while it is a deviance (or hurdle) that some autistic persons never overcome.

Glüer and Pagin also raise the question of the possibility of "parasitic membership" for some members in a linguistic community.[44] They raise it in connection with Lewis' conventionalism in meaning theory. They hold that finding linguistic communities consisting only of subjects with autism is highly unlikely, and that it might be empirically correct "that a community of only persons with autism could not develop language from a pre-linguistic state."[45] However, they argue that if it could be possible that only autistic members of the linguistic community survive, and we assume that they continue to use language, the lack of counterexamples will be a "mere contingency". But I will hold that the background for, and the way in which humans has learned to speak is not a mere contingency and not irrelevant to the question. The conditions for development of language, and the question of how a person has come to be a speaker also matters in Davidson's theory. And this is not first of all a metaphysical question, but a biological and causal one. If it is true that "a community of only persons with autism could not develop language from a pre-linguistic state", then we probably cannot reconstruct such a community's ways into language and thought in the same manner as has been done for communities of non-autistic speakers by Davidson.

Davidson has pointed out three factors that are necessary conditions for language and thought.[46] These factors are dispositions, normality and error. It is a common trait for humans as biological creatures to be disposed to categorize the world and thus to discriminate in perception. That something like the normal cause for a thought has come to exist is the basis for establishing a notion of normality. When two creatures respond to objects and events, so that a common cause of the most frequent cases have been established, errors can occur. The three factors are claimed to be necessary factors;

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[44] Ibid, p. 43, note 29.
[45] Ibid.
[46] In Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, page 9.

however, they are not claimed to be sufficient for development of language. In order to acquire language, Davidson assumes that we also have to be raised in a society of language users, where ostensive learning plays an important role. As individual speakers, we share a common biological background with other humans and a personal, social and causal history of language learning. In particular, we should note that interpretation of other speakers is a part of the establishment of the conditions of normality and error. If a creature were unable to evaluate a possible relevant similarity of the linguistic reactions of himself and the other person in triangulation, and that he thus was disabled to ascribe a belief to a speaker on the basis of correlated causal connections and his own system of beliefs, no normality could be established. Interpretation requires personal assessment of the belief-contents of oneself and others. Hence, it is doubtful that the conditions for language and thought that Davidson has pointed out would be an acceptable reconstruction of the conditions for language and thought for a linguistic community of only persons with autism. My point here is that language and thought cannot be disconnected from its biological and causal constitution and from the way in which we learn to use language in the first place. We cannot just take away the learning environment and the causal history of language learning for the linguistic community of autistic survivors, and then use the remains as a counter example. As long as it is highly improbable that an autistic linguistic community could develop language from a pre-linguistic state, the mere accidental existence of a survivor-group of autistic speakers, raised in a community with non-autistic speakers could not be a convincing counterexample to Davidson's theory.

6. Concluding Discussion

Davidson's thesis is that unless a person has the concept of belief (second order beliefs), he or she doesn't have a belief. This view faces the challenge that actual people can be interpreted as having beliefs – they seem to be in the mental state that the concept belief is supposed to be the concept of – without having second order beliefs. The challenge could be read as a claim that the conceptual analysis that Davidson has based his thesis upon contradicts physical reality, and is refuted for this reason.

There are several problems here: first, a *conceptual* analysis, where we show that certain concepts stand in specific relations to certain other concepts, cannot be straightforwardly refuted by *empirical* evidence, per se. The reason is that the meaning of the concepts will be settled in relation to each other, and besides, they will not necessarily have empirical counterparts in the world that they correspond to. Even so, if we assume that the intentional concepts *do* have empirical counterparts, it is still not obvious that we can have access to them in any other way but through interpretation and we will in this way have access to the concepts as intentional concepts. On the other hand, a conceptual analysis that has empirical implications can in principle be proven irrelevant for a given empirical phenomenon, as has been held to be the case here. The conceptual analysis could be shown to give a faulty description of some particular state (or relations between states) of an organism.

As Pagin and Glüer argue, one specific state-type in a person (belief) does *not* necessarily and always presuppose another state-type (second order belief) in that person. We can assume that this is correct, but it is still an open question what Davidson's claims really amount to, and thus, whether this represents a genuine counter-example. On the one hand he says things like: "I merely describe a feature of certain concepts."[47] This statement justifies an interpretation of Davidson as "merely" analyzing concepts, and seems to suggest that his analysis of belief is immune to empirical research on the area. On the other hand he says: "Much of the point of the concept of belief is that it is the concept of a state of an organism which can be true or false, correct or incorrect."[48] That Davidson sees the concept of belief as the concept of a state of an organism could indicate that he is after more than *just* a conceptual analysis. When he talks about states of organisms, it seems clear that Davidson seeks an empirical phenomenon of belief. Based on an epistemological interpretation of his thesis, it seems that we can still keep Davidson's conceptual analysis of the relation between the concepts of belief, second order belief and truth. But, we should be careful to think that we then address the same notion of belief that is being employed in a range of empirical studies within psychology. We should be even more cautious in our thinking about the belief when it comes to the belief as an ontological entity and the belief

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[47] Donald Davidson: "Rational Animals" (1982) pp 473-80 in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin. Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 473.

(or any other type of attitude) as a brain state. This would, of course, also apply to second-order beliefs. On the other hand, if we do not consider empirical issues as even potentially serious objections we could of course defend the claims about second order belief a priori. But this can hardly be tempting for a naturalist.

I have given two arguments against reading the results of false-belief tests as counter-examples to Davidson's thesis that second-order belief is required for having beliefs. The first is that Davidson's concept of belief, defined as it is from within a cluster of intentional notions, is not the same concept as the concepts employed in the studies in question. Even though I think that I have demonstrated that this argument refutes Glüer and Pagin's claim that autistic speakers constitute a counter-example to Davidson's claims[49] when it comes to an epistemic or methodological version of Davidson's claim (that second order belief is necessary for belief), an ontological version of the claim has demonstrably not been refuted. Whether or not Davidson has held an ontological version of the claim, and whether it could be defended, will not be further discussed here. The second argument against the case of autistic speakers as a counter example is that the belief-like concepts and states of autistic individuals are parasitic on the language of non-autistic individuals. Therefore, I hold that autistic speakers do not constitute a genuine counter example, since it must be assumed that autistic speakers can only acquire language in a non-autistic linguistic environment, or in an environment in which a majority of the speakers have second order beliefs. I argue that the reason for this is that interpretational abilities are a condition for thought and language.

For Radical Interpretation as a method, and an interpretational approach to language and knowledge, it is inevitable that we uphold second order beliefs as criteria for ascription of prepositional attitudes. If we must give up on second order belief as criteria for interpretation, no interpretation in the sense that is described in Davidson's approach will be possible, since we need to assess both our own beliefs and the beliefs of other speakers in order to interpret in accordance with the principle of charity. The principle of charity

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[48] Ibid.

[49] They mention Davidson's claim that "one cannot have beliefs at all unless one has the concept of objective truth" and the claim that "no one believes anything that does not grasp the concept of belief". (In Glüer and Pagin 2003, note 5, p. 25)

presupposes that the interpreter is able to evaluate beliefs based on causal impact from the world and hypotheses about sentence meanings. The weighing of belief against meaning and meaning against belief obviously presuppose the ability of assessing beliefs. Assessing beliefs means to have beliefs about beliefs. This means that second order belief is interwoven with this version of interpretationism to such a great extent that we simply cannot do without it. Radical interpretation cannot be construed without second order belief and still make sense. Furthermore, our ability to question and assess our own beliefs is vital for the ability to see and uphold the difference between belief and truth. If we loose the distinction between truth and belief we will loose the opportunity to have an internally based constitution (or co-constitution) of the concept of objective truth.[50]

Synthesis[1]

Throughout the work on the articles above, I have often run two different situations where I have had to choose between two alternative ways of interpreting Davidson's philosophy. One of these situations is the one where I had the choice of interpreting Davidson into a transcendental-philosophical vein or interpreting him as a naturalistic philosopher. The major theme of this synthesis is therefore the relation between the naturalizing tendency that we find in Davidson's philosophy and a possible transcendental ambition. Over time, I have come to see Davidson's project as naturalized rather than transcendental-philosophical, as I have found that one inevitably needs a naturalist reading to achieve a proper overall understanding of his project. The principle of charity is one factor in Davidson's theory that I had suspected would be a challenge to such a reading, but I found that it didn't. Quite to the contrary, I realized that it is impossible to ascribe the principle a status compatible with a transcendental approach. The problem of error is another factor that has turned out to be important in the question of an overall reading of Davidson as a naturalist philosopher. I have argued that the problem of error stems from an inner discrepancy in Davidson's thinking, where it has become clear that the craving for objective truth is incongruent with the model of radical interpretation and the general naturalistic orientation found in Davidson's thinking. A third momentum for the overall analysis of Davidson's epistemological position is Davidson's reliance upon second order belief. It has turned out that second order belief within Davidson's project cannot be naturalized in the sense of ascribing it a biological basis in humans. Second order belief cannot be given a material equivalent in the human mind. In this question I have reached towards one of the outermost points of Davidsonian naturalism, and found a way in which Davidson's epistemology cannot be naturalized.

The other situation of choice is that between interpreting Davidson's philosophical theses as epistemologically and methodologically based *or* ontologically based. In this case, the methodological path has, over and over again, turned out to be the most reasonable choice.

The reasons for this are given in each of the situations, but I have found a general tendency: Davidson's arguments cover only epistemological or methodological readings, and only very unlikely cover ontological readings. However, I will not further go into this second situation of choice in this synthesis.

We will take a closer look at the question of naturalism, as this is an underlying factor throughout all the articles. An account of what I mean by the term "naturalism" is therefore mandatory for discussing my overall reading of Davidson. I give a short presentation of the characteristics of Quine's naturalized epistemology, as this is the form of naturalism that Davidson relates to. Quine's naturalism and Davidson's are certainly similar, but by no means identical. Therefore, I discuss in the following how Davidson differs from Quine, and what naturalism can be within Davidson's thinking. Naturalism and studies concerned with the analysis of normativity are often considered disparate. In the question of whether we can talk about "normativity" as a phenomenon in its own right in connection with human action and language, or whether mere regularity of behavior is all there is, the reductive naturalist would say the latter. I discuss why Davidson would choose the former and how a study of normativity can find its place in Davidson's version of naturalism. Discussions of naturalism will occupy the three first chapters of this synthesis. However, the full meaning of Davidsonian naturalism will only be evident when we go into details in the summary and discussion of the articles. Chapters 4 through 9 summarize each of the articles, and in addition to highlighting some of the main points from the articles my aim is to confront each of the articles with my overall reading of Davidson's naturalism. The order in which I go through the articles reflects their importance in an evaluation of my overall reading, the more decisive first. The three remaining chapters of this Synthesis deal with the questions of objective truth and knowledge within an interpretational approach. But now, let's turn to naturalism.

1. Naturalism

Quine's 1969 article "Epistemology Naturalized" has been the "locus classicus" for the many who have tried to tie philosophical theories of knowledge up to scientific reasoning, in attempts to naturalize epistemology. The article has functioned as a research program for some of the philosophers that have later characterized their own thinking as "naturalized

epistemology". Some of these theories are being worked out on basis of empirical studies in psychology, which means that the theories in question are more or less based on descriptions of how we arrive at our beliefs. However, studies of how people actually reason are often related to how one ought to reason in order to reach specific aims or fulfill specific norms of reasoning. In this sense, naturalized epistemology has not necessarily been on the whole descriptive, and as such insensitive to "the normative", even though this has been a more or less constant accusation. Anyway, most "naturalized epistemologists" would admit that "...questions of how we actually arrive at our beliefs are [] relevant questions about how we ought to arrive at our beliefs."[2] So, whether to go for a "thorough" Quinean program, popularly termed "the replacement thesis", in where epistemology is to be replaced by empirical psychology, or to go for a more mixed solution, Quine's article has been the ultimate source for naturalization of epistemology.[3]

In general, naturalism can be the view that everything that exists and everything that happens are empirically accessible traits of the world, and can be explained as such. A version hereof is the view that everything must be reducible to, or be understood via, scientific laws and theories. These views are both reductionist views in the sense that intentional phenomena must be reducible to empirical entities in order to exist or in order to be understood. Hence, we are either dealing with ontological reductionism (that all that exists is the physical or that everything must be reducible to the physical) or with methodological reductionism (that everything that exists must be explained as, or understandable as, physical), and the mentioned specific version is, in addition, scientistic. We will keep these conceptions of naturalism in mind, but since it becomes obvious that Davidson disavows reductionist versions of naturalism, we will not go into further detail on this point. However, it should be clear that naturalism and normativity have been regarded as belonging to different spheres. A naturalized theory of knowledge and a theory of knowledge ensuring the normative aspect of human intentionality are traditionally

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[2] Hilary Kornblith: "What Is Naturalistic Epistemology?" in Kornblith, Hilary (ed): *Naturalizing Epistemology*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, pp 1-14.
[3] A replacement version of naturalized epistemology implies studies of actual belief-acquisition whereof the works of Hilary Kornblith and Stephen Stitch are examples. They are among the philosophers that see themselves as carrying out a Quinean program of naturalized epistemology, albeit different from Quine's own way of doing naturalized philosophy. These empirically oriented studies are also different from Davidson's way of doing epistemology.

considered opposites. I argue that Davidson's theory of knowledge questions the very point of a clear-cut opposition.

2. Quine's notion of naturalized epistemology

In "Epistemology Naturalized" Quine's overall aim is to show that epistemology is not a "first philosophy". He is a critic of those who think that we can give our knowledge of the world a fundament outside the physical world itself. Descartes would be an obvious candidate in this respect, in the sense that the fundament for knowledge of the physical world is to be found in Res Cogitans and that it further is secured by God. Even if Quine does not mention Descartes, he argues against the idea of a philosophical fundament for the certainty of scientific knowledge, a fundament steadier than ordinary scientific method. Epistemology cannot supply a justification for our knowledge of the external world, he holds, and any justification for such knowledge is thus to be found in further empirical or scientific investigation. Quine sees epistemology as a continuation of the natural sciences, and philosophy can be distinguished from the sciences by its generality. It engages in broader and more general matters than those entertained in sciences such as mathematics and psychology.[4] Otherwise, when it comes to methodology, evidence and founding, he maintains, epistemology is of the same standing as the sciences.

Quine claims that skeptical questions arise within science. It is our success in understanding the world, and the subsequent realization that there could be a difference between the way the world appears to us, and the way the world is, which renders the skeptical question possible in the first place. Therefore, Quine upholds, we can employ the resources of science itself (in his broad sense) in order to answer the questions that science has given rise to. If we are trying to explain how empirical knowledge is possible, the classical epistemological view will be that it is illegitimate to use the resources of science in answering this question. The idea is that we would then employ the very knowledge that has been questioned, and this would therefore not be regarded as an answer to the question,

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[4] This could be put even stronger, as we read Quine in his "Has Philosophy Lost Contact with People?" Quine points out that many of the greatest philosophers of the past also were scientists, and that their philosophical studies, in terms of a struggle with "concepts and the quest for a system on a grand scale" were integral to their scientific enterprise. Willard Van Orman Quine: "Has Philosophy Lost Contact with People?" pp 190-193 in *Theories and Things*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1981.

or alternatively, it would be deemed a bypassing of the problem.[5] According to Quine, on the other hand, we should rather look at the question of how knowledge is possible as an empirical question. It is a question of how creatures like us could end up having correct beliefs about the world. The question is: "How do correct beliefs about the world come into being?" And it is precisely this question he addresses in his epistemology, even though his investigation is far from what we would normally deem empirical, since it, as we have seen in article 1, consists of a thought experiment. The thought experiment of radical translation is, however, informed and restricted by our knowledge of empirical matters.

What Quine thinks epistemology properly should engage in is the relation between humans and their surroundings. Epistemology should be an inquiry into how, based on sensory stimulation, people can arrive at the beliefs they do have about the world, including scientific beliefs about nerve endings etc. According to Quine the object of study is the relation between theory and evidence, or more specifically, a study of *how* evidence relates to theory. "The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one's theory of nature transcends any available evidence."[6] It is the relation between "surface irritation" and "knowledge of the world", or again the relation between "sensory stimulation" and "belief" that is to be studied. Epistemology as naturalized[7] is, in Quine's view, the study of the relation between sensory evidence (i.e. the stimulation of our sensory receptors) and our descriptions of the external world. Observation sentences[8] play a particular role in this study. Firstly, they are the evidence on which our theory rests. Secondly, they are located at an intersection between language and reality where language confronts reality in a sufficiently direct manner for single sentences to be learnt one by one. When learning a language, Quine holds, we go from learning simple observation

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[5] Descartes, for instance, well aware of the "pitfall", tried to answer the skeptic by denying all the beliefs that he found to be logically possible to doubt, and is generally considered as thereby having managed to avoid getting into a scrape.

[6] W. V. Quine: "Epistemology naturalized", pp 69-90 in his *Ontological Relativity & Other Essays*, Columbia University Press, New York 1969, p. 82f.

[7] Naturalized as for *natural* knowledge, not *formal*, even if there according to Quine are only gradual differences here. Hume, on the other hand, whose «predicament» Quine here relates to, distinguishes sharply between the two forms of knowledge. Quine makes use of this distinction in his analysis of Russell and Carnap's achievements in his "Epistemology Naturalized".

[8] Observation sentences are situation sentences that have a stimulus meaning that is not varying when influenced by additional (collateral) information. Their stimulus meaning yields full justice to their meaning. This is so because they are initiated by an intersubjectively observable present stimulus.

sentences towards an understanding of more complex and more theoretical sentences. As the quotation above suggests, the evidence does not "cover" the theory and this means our theory, for principled reasons, will not be properly supported.

Quine's own investigation into the relation between humans and their surroundings consists in a study of language learning. The investigation is pursued as the thought experiment of radical translation. The inquiry could, perhaps, be seen as a substitute for the empirical inquiries that Quine generally advices us to carry out, but as Quine denounces strict boundaries between that which is empirical and the theoretical, he would, on his own terms, be agnostic to the question. Quine's theory of radical translation is thus his choice of investigation into epistemology, and radical translation is the basis for his developed theory of knowledge.

Quine's naturalized epistemology is concerned with the relation between philosophy and science. Holism (which in this case means that a scientific hypothesis cannot be tested on its own) is one of Quine's strongest arguments for naturalism. The reason why a scientific hypothesis cannot be tested alone is that an empirical hypothesis is tied up with the rest of our system of beliefs (and our more theoretical hypotheses) to such an extent that it is impossible to localize something like the hypothesis' own stock of privileged observation sentences to uniquely verify or falsify it. According to a Quinean view, there is a continuum from the theoretical to the empirical, and from philosophy to science.[9] Accordingly, there is no first philosophy. Hence, the thesis of gradualism is at the center of Quine's naturalized epistemology.

3. Davidson's understanding of Naturalism

Davidson's understanding of naturalism is not obvious even to faithful and observant readers of Davidson's writings. The theme is seldom discussed, and a general reason for this can be found in Davidson's reluctance to characterize philosophy in terms of "isms". When Davidson takes up the theme, it is in relation to the problem of other minds, i.e. the problem that arises when we ask how we can tell that another person has experiences and

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[9] There is, according to Quine, also a continuum from ordinary belief to science. The difference between them is thus not a principled epistemic difference, but a difference in exactness and strictness of method.

thoughts anything similar to our own. Observation of the other person's behavior, verbal as well as non-verbal, is what we have to go on. According to Davidson, "The problem has not been solved, at least to most philosopher's satisfaction. What has happened instead is that the subject has undergone a sort of naturalization."[10] In a footnote he adds that: "I say a "sort" of naturalization because the word has been used so differently by different philosophers. Here I am not taking naturalization to involve showing, or trying to show, how to reduce talk of mental states to something that can be subsumed under the natural sciences; *I do take it to involve shifting from trying to justify our claims to knowledge to describing our normal ways of achieving knowledge.*"[11] According to Davidson, the problem of other minds has been transformed from being a presumed solvable philosophical problem and into being a study of normal ways of achieving knowledge.

Davidson says that where we earlier tried to answer the skeptic, we now assume that we know more or less what goes on in the minds of others. We acknowledge that we already have a good grip on what is going on, and we wonder how it came about that we got this good grip on things. What we do is that we start noting how we go about when we actually acquire or arrive at the knowledge that we have of other minds. "How are we able to find out what goes on in the minds of others?" is then our leading question, and an answer to this question could be a description of our normal ways of finding out what goes on in others' minds.[12] Thus, we have to describe our normal ways of interpreting each other. This means that an interpretational approach in epistemology, to the extent that it describes normal ways of interpretation between speakers, *is* a naturalized study of knowledge, according to the understanding of naturalism found in Davidson. But interpretationism as a version of naturalized epistemology is still not empirical psychology. I would say that interpretationism is guided by quite different ideas about the relation between science and philosophy than those that guide defenders of the so-called "replacement-thesis". Radical interpretation is an epistemological approach where the differences between ordinary belief, philosophy and science are gradual. It could be argued that those who take Quine's advice about replacing traditional epistemology with empirical psychology to be an advice about leaving philosophy altogether, haven't understood Quine well.

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[10] Donald Davidson: "Interpretation: Hard in Theory, Easy in Practice", p. 31 in Mario De Caro (ed): *Interpretation and Causes. New Perspectives on Donald Davidson's Philosophy*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1999.
[11] Ibid, p. 43, n. 1.
[12] Donald Davidson: "Interpretation: Hard in Theory, Easy in Practice", p. 31 in Mario De Caro (ed): *Interpretation and Causes. New Perspectives on Donald Davidson's Philosophy*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1999.

On the other hand, it has been assumed that Davidson's theory of interpretation cannot be naturalized insofar as it contains at least one principle with a supposed constitutive status, i.e. the principle of charity. The presumed epistemic status of the principle of charity has, in my opinion, rightfully, been regarded incompatible with the naturalistic doctrine of gradualism.[13] If we presuppose that constitutive principles do have a principled *different* epistemic status than other kinds of principles, that we e.g. ascribe constitutive principles a status as synthetic apriori, and we simultaneously embrace gradualism, then we have an inconsistent theory. If this is the case, we have to choose between operating with principles with a fundamentally different epistemic status than the rest of our principles and theses on the one hand, and the denouncement of gradualism, on the other. Constitutive principles are normally localized in theories seen as opposed to naturalism. If it is correct that Davidson's epistemology contains principles with another epistemic status than empirical knowledge, it is not likely that his epistemology could be naturalized in a strictly Quinean sense. This means that there are serious reasons for doubting that there could be something like a naturalized epistemology containing constitutive principles.

Anyhow, Davidson is accepting a form of naturalism in the elongation of Quine's thinking. Davidson regards Quine's naturalized epistemology as first of all aiming at giving an account of *what normally happens when we acquire knowledge*. This means that epistemology should not try to give a fundament for knowledge, and neither should it in other ways take its purpose to be the delivery of a foundation for knowledge.[14] Davidson notes that the method of starting by accepting common sense or science, then going on "to ask for a description of the nature and origins of such knowledge" has been called naturalism, and he seems to have no misgivings if his way of doing philosophy is being characterized in this way.[15] The next feature of Quine's naturalized epistemology that Davidson says that he wishes to continue to pursue is Quine's *third person approach to epistemology*. I assume that Davidson is referring to Quine's "method" in epistemology, the situation described as radical translation, in which an interpreter takes the third person perspective in observing the relation between stimuli from external physical surroundings

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[13] See Mikael Janvid: *Naturalism and the status of epistemology*, Preprint no. 7, Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University, Stockholm 2001.

[14] "Epistemology Externalized" (1990), p. 193 in Donald Davidson: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.

[15] Donald Davidson: "The Problem of Objectivity", p. 5 in *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004.

for the speaker, and the speaker's theory. This is Davidson's methodological starting point, but he soon advances into a more complex situation, in which the interpreter also observes his own relations of stimuli and belief-system and correlates this with the speaker's. This more complex situation presupposes a more extensive use of the principle of charity, but does not break with the original methodology in any principled sense. Davidson does not, on the other hand, accept Quine's account of the nature of knowledge, because Davidson takes Quine's view to be essentially first person oriented and Cartesian.[16] Quine's insistence on stimulation of the individual's sensory surface as the source of knowledge of an external world is an important element in his view upon knowledge. Quine takes for granted that our knowledge of the external world comes from the causal effect this world has on the nerve endings of each subject. Davidson holds, on the other hand, that objects and events in the physical world are what influences us causally. This is why Davidson considers the Quinean approach first person oriented. According to Davidson, objects and events cannot play an epistemically justifying role, whereas Quine, on the other hand, takes sensory stimuli to be evidence.[17] Hence, the reason why Davidson's approach presumably is not first person oriented is that objects and events, according to Davidson, are partly socially constituted. It is, however, something of an irony that Quine is charged with being Cartesian, given that Quine's overall aim in his project of naturalizing epistemology is to overcome foundationalism, a characteristic trait of Cartesianism.

What Davidson thus brings along from Quine's naturalism is, firstly, a denial of the claim that epistemology is a kind of first philosophy, that can form a basis for all other kinds of knowledge. This implies that instead of asking *whether* we have knowledge, epistemology should be occupied with *how we acquire* knowledge. The study of how we acquire knowledge should be carried out from a third person perspective, and this is the second aspect that Davidson brings along from Quine's naturalized epistemology, even though this second feature is not specifically associated with naturalism. Hence, I would say that with (only) these two features, Davidson's own formulation of naturalism is quite general.

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[16] Donald Davidson: "Epistemology Externalized" (1990), p. 194 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.
[17] See W. V. Quine: "Epistemology Naturalized" p. 75 in *Ontological Relativity*, Columbia University Press, New York 1969.

However, it is pretty clear that Davidson has also adopted Quine's holism and fallibilism. As Quine, Davidson could be characterized as doing immanent, as opposed to transcendent (-al) philosophy, in the sense that they both deny that epistemology can be foundational. But if Davidson has accepted Quine's thesis of gradualism; that there are only gradual differences between philosophy and science, and fallibilism; that everything in principle is up for revision, then we would suppose that neither could Davidson's radical interpretation be apriori in a classical sense. Davidson does not explicitly say that philosophy and science is of the same standing, but has denied that epistemology can be a first philosophy. Epistemology does not precede science, and, according to Davidson, epistemology cannot stand above and "evaluate" scientific contributions. Both Quine and Davidson would basically reject the existence of eternal and unchangeable structures as something that knowledge could be founded upon, and when they both hold that all forms of knowledge are in principle fallible, this would also have to be so for epistemic structures. The question that I have raised is whether some of the conditions and presuppositions that are part of Davidson's philosophy deserve another kind of status than Davidson has assigned knowledge in general. We could more generally say that the question is whether Davidson could be read as a naturalist, in the sense accounted for above, through and through. Now, we go on to summarize each of the articles and the question of naturalism thus related will be our particular interest.

4. The Explanation of Error

Article 4, "The Explanation of Error", gives the most thorough account for the problem of error within this collection of articles. I start by distinguishing between an internal and an external perspective on intentionality and the problem of error. Davidson's attempt at an external explanation points out the following three conditions for thought about an external world: First, common dispositions for discrimination in perception that humans share, such that we categorize the world in similar ways, and judge similarly about similarities. Second, there is the condition that something statistically will be picked out as a type of cause for a given thought, and this is the normal cause for a thought. The third condition is that error can occur, and this happens when creatures respond to stimuli in non-characteristic ways, creating a divergence from normally similar reactions. These three conditions are necessary conditions for thought and language, but are insufficient for an

explanation of these. Hence, Davidson points out a fourth condition – regarding the acquisition of language in a society of language users. According to Davidson, the acquisition of language with the help of ostensive teaching is necessary in order to explain how the intentional can be possible and how thought and language can emerge. But Davidson holds that we have still not, even with this fourth condition, given sufficient conditions for intentionality, and thus for objective thought. However, he maintains that we should not expect further progress in an attempt at an external explanation, as he holds that this would "amount to a reduction of the intentional to the extensional". I may add that such a reduction would explain the phenomenon away, in the sense that it would disappear in the form in which we are interested in it. Davidson recommends that we continue our search for an explanation of thought about an external world, and our search for an explanation of error, from within the intentional.

Explaining the intentional, explaining thought and language, explaining objective thought, and explaining error are, as we can see, assumed to be different sides of the same project. If we could give an explanation of one, we would have an explanation of all. But what is the motivation behind this felt need for an explanation? There can be many reasons for such a craving. It could be as simple as a "what is really...?" question, and such questions are indeed intrinsic to philosophy. However, I have taken it that there are two different motivations for the quest for an explanation of error. One is the more general quest for objectivity of knowledge of the world, of other minds and of our own minds, and objectivity of meaning. This motivation arises from a pressure from different kinds of skepticism towards Davidson's account of meaning and knowledge. The other motivation is internal to the method of radical interpretation and the model of triangulation, and it is a question of explaining how the interpreter can explain error in the interpretational situation. Moreover, these two motivations are connected.

When I compare the accounts of radical translation and radical interpretation on the question of explaining the possibility of error, I find that Quine never had this problem. I argue that Davidson's focus on matching of truth conditions for the utterances of speaker and interpreter "creates" the problem in the first place. For Quine, smooth communication is the only criterion needed for saying whether or not a translation manual is a success. This is due to his notion of stimulus meaning, which is an empirical concept. Matching

stimulus meaning for informant and manual is enough to secure smooth communication. According to Quine, all there ever was to semantic meaning is absorbed in successful translation. Davidson, however, has the matching of truth conditions for the speaker's utterance with the truth conditions for the interpreter's analytical hypothesis of the utterance (which is built on the interpreters own set of beliefs) as the correlation to be made. Now, the truth conditions will necessarily be similar for the speaker's utterance and the interpreter's interpretation of the utterance, since this is all built upon the interpreter's reasonable beliefs in the first place. This means that there is nothing further to appeal to. We could always ask why we would need a court of appeal in this case, when we didn't need one in Quine's case. The answer is that Davidson has brought in truth. While we, in the case of radical translation, have all the evidence there is, and evidence is all we need, Davidson is not content with evidence. He wants objective truth. Matching utterances' truth conditions and sharing verbal behavior is not sufficient since, according to Davidson, both the speaker and the interpreter might be wrong. Smooth communication is simply not sufficient. The demands have been raised, and from Davidson's perspective there was a good reason for the demands to be raised. I maintain that anything less than the truth is too little to cash out Davidson's concept of knowledge.

I argue that we have to recognize two kinds of error in order to get to grips with the problem of explaining error. There is error in belief, which amounts to false belief, and there is error in meaning. The determination of what kind of error we are dealing with is in principle hypothetical, as is radical interpretation in general. I argue that propositional seeing and language is a condition for error in meaning, and that it thus is a condition for the possibility of recognizing two kinds of error. The reason for this is mainly methodological; if the creature in question is non-linguistic, its seeing is accordingly non-propositional, that is, as far as an interpreter can know. It must therefore be clear that the notion of error that we are dealing with is related to *linguistic* creatures.

Since the notion of error is so clearly a notion related to speakers, it is important to uphold the distinction between making a mistake in meaning, or a linguistic mistake and making a mistake in belief, or a factual mistake. I take up a suggestion by Eva Picardi, where the contention is that it is Davidson's focus on the idiolect (the language of an individual speaker) that endangers or blurs this distinction within Davidson's theory. This is due to

the methodological situation of the radical interpreter, as the interpreter relates only to one speaker at a time. When the interpreter finds that some specific verbal behavior of the speaker diverges from the normal ways of the speaker, he tries to check whether the irregularity is due to a mistake in belief about the world for the speaker, or if it is due to some conceptual mistake in the truth theory for the speaker that the interpreter has conjectured. The interpreter's check will have to be a social check no matter what kind of error has been made. It is possible to disregard errors that are due to different localization and therewith - different perceptions. The interpreter can therefore find that regularity of behavior is established on an observational basis, so that the correlations between verbal behavior and stimuli are the same for the speaker over time, and that these correlated sets are the same for the speaker and the interpreter over some given time. The interpreter can thus check whether he and the speaker are picking out the same object in such a way that regularity in behavior has been established. But the problem is that in order to find out whether the speaker has employed the words in a "wrong" way, the interpreter can only rely on the speaker's previous utterances. The interpreter can in this way check for coherence with the speaker's previous utterances, and correlate utterance with circumstances, then and now. And there it stops. A check of the speaker's utterances against the speaker's own utterances, as the interpreter has interpreted them, is not a sufficient social check. It is not sufficient for testing whether both speaker and interpreter can be wrong.

This means that the social comes in at the point of the emergence of individual languages, and that it due to the radical interpretational model cannot come in, in significant ways, at later occasions. The reason why this is a problem, does, however, not turn up when irregularities occur. The problem turns out to be that the interpreter cannot know whether or not both the speaker and the interpreter are wrong when communication is smooth. The reason why one would need a social check when communication is smooth is Davidson's presumption that objective truth is to be established in triangulation. As long as objective truth is out of reach for the speaker-interpreters in radical interpretation, we will not be able to solve the problem of error. My contention is that the individual concept of language, together with the craving for objective truth, so far has been an obstacle in the path of an explanation of error within the radical interpretational approach. We need a

community-based notion of language, but this does not blend well with the basically individual methodology of radical interpretation.

In article 4 we have seen that Davidson's version of epistemology is naturalistic in yet another sense than already noted in the previous treatment of the theme in this synthesis. Davidson's account of intentionality is based in evolutionary thinking in the sense that he considers human dispositions for discrimination one out of four conditions for thought. This means that human rationality is partly based in human nature and not in some McDowellian "logical space of reasons" or some Kantian "realm of freedom". Furthermore, the statistic notion of normality likewise points in a naturalist, rather then a transcendental (-pragmatic) direction.

Article 4 also raised the question of whether a concept of truth, and, in particular, the concept of objective truth, has pretensions that are more metaphysical than the otherwise naturalized conception of radical interpretation allows for. Objective truth is most certainly an on-or-off value; it is not gradual and fallible.[18] This question will be dealt with further in the three last chapters of this synthesis.

5. The Status of the Principle of Charity

In article 3, "The Status of the Principle of Charity", I analyze the function of the principle of charity within the theory of radical interpretation and discuss the epistemic status of the principle. An account of the genesis of the principle within Davidson's authorship is given, as I believe that such an approach will be important for a proper understanding of the principle's status. I present and discuss an account of the weighing function that the principle has towards meaning and belief, as the principle makes it possible for the interpreter to hold beliefs constant while solving for meaning. I emphasize the principle's role to enable the production of a first hypothesis of the speaker's meaning, and also the principle's role to ensure truth and consistency in a first attempt at a theory about the speaker's meanings and beliefs. The claim that the principle brings out *hypotheses* about meanings and beliefs is decisive for our reading of Davidson's project. I maintain that an

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[18] See especially p. 83 and p. 92f of my article 4.

alternative claim that the principle *constitutes* meanings and beliefs is the origin of incompatible readings.

Radical interpretation is a thought experiment, and a conceptual exercise. I stress the importance of not taking radical interpretation to be ideal, in the sense of a prefigurative or exemplary situation of interpretation. The interpreter is not ideal, and neither is the speaker. They are both normal in the sense that they are fallible. Thus I would say that it would be wrong to assume that the principle of charity in radical interpretation could constitute a speaker's actual meanings and beliefs as what would be *ideally rational* for him to believe and mean. However, radical interpretation is a theoretical model, and the principle is designed for this model, not for real interpretation. I argue that if radical interpretation did not use normal fallible interpreters and speakers as models in radical interpretation, the thought experiment would have no transmittance value. Moreover, if we think of the principle of charity as a normative principle, in the sense that we think about the speaker as being *more* consistent than an ordinary speaker and that the principle suggest that we impose *ideal* rationality on to the speaker, Davidson can easily be construed as an idealist and indeed an anti-realist philosopher. Even if he hadn't cared much, due to his lack of respect for thinking in "isms", many objections based upon misunderstandings of his project would be apt to be produced.[19]

I discuss whether the principle of charity can be synthetic a priori, as Davidson once suggested. The principle is a condition for interpretation, and it is constitutive in one sense, since one inevitably needs to use the principle in the forming of a theory of meaning and belief for a speaker. According to a Kantian conception of a priori, the a priori makes experience possible, but the a priori is independent of experience. However, the entire thought experiment of radical interpretation completely antedates experience, and this generally makes it hard to evaluate whether it is apriori in Kant's sense. According to Kant, that which is a priori is supposed to be necessary and non-revisable, and the principle is arguably necessary within the theory of radical interpretation, but it is otherwise hard to tell. I find that the theory as such is revisable, but it is not easy to find a way to decide

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[19] See e.g. J.J.C. Smart's article "Correspondence, Coherence, and Realism" in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, pp 109-122.

whether or not the principle is revisable. At the least, I argue, there is no *particular* experience that could be relevant for revising it.

Since the Kantian concept does not quite seem to fit our case, I consider a more modern concept of a prioricity, employed in the introduction to an anthology, *New Essays on the A Priori*, from 2000, edited by Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke. In this version of a prioricity it is assumed that the truth of an a priori assertion can be known independently of experience. However, being a priori is neither to be considered necessary nor infallibly knowable. Still, the a priori seemingly cannot be invalidated by "wholly empirical information". Transferred to the case of the principle of charity; we can know that the principle of charity must be valid in radical interpretation, and this comes close to saying that we can know its truth independently of experience. But if the principle were found to be revisable, it would be hard to uphold a claim that the principle comes within the scope of a concept of a prioricity. However, Boghossian and Peacocke hold that precisely these two traits are hallmarks of a specific form of a prioricity. They maintain that the case for "non-conclusive a priori entitlement" is a case where we can know the truth of an assertion independently of experience, and where it simultaneously is open to empirically conditioned revision. The interesting question for us, when we consider the principle of charity, is therefore whether or not it is open to empirically conditioned revision. Or, to turn the other side out: is the principle immune to empirical invalidation or not?

I consider the traits of radical interpretation that is not dependent on empirical reality, such as presuppositions about what a natural language is, and the psychological and physical reality of the creatures involved. These presuppositions are very general, and I argue that it is unlikely that it could turn out that we are genuinely mistaken about these traits. However, if it turns out that we are mistaken in making these assumptions, I maintain that the consequences for the status of the principle are obscure. It may be, however, that the principle can be empirically invalidated in some *other* way, but it is not easy to see how this could come about.

The question of empirical invalidation of the principle could, however, be read as a question about the status of the *beliefs* that we ascribe to a speaker with the help of the principle. This means that we really meant to ask whether the beliefs ascribed to the

speaker in radical interpretation can be empirically invalidated or not. If we assume that the principle is a priori, could it be that the beliefs that the principle helps us to ascribe is also a priori? No, this can hardly be a consequence, since the beliefs that we ascribe to a speaker (according to the interpretational theory) are always hypothetical ascriptions, and besides, the speaker is normal. Hence, it is highly probable that some of his beliefs are false.

But it could also be that we meant to ask whether the beliefs we ascribe to the speaker by using the principle come out right. This means asking whether we, in employing the principle are able to get a correct theory of the speaker's beliefs and meanings. Could it be the case that another principle, or a completely different method, could do this job in such a way that a result would be a radically different theory about the speaker's beliefs and meanings, such that the speaker comes out with different beliefs?[20] In order to check this, we would have to be able to discover the beliefs of the speaker independently of the principle of charity, and then check whether the result obtained in this way is in agreement with the result we obtain by employment of the principle of charity. It is hard to imagine how we could perform such a check independent of the principle. For the theory of radical interpretation the principle thus seems to be necessary.

The principle could, of course, be indirectly invalidated if we were to replace the theory of radical interpretation with an entirely new theory, but then we could hardly say that the principle has been *empirically* invalidated.

I conclude that it *so far seems* that the principle of charity cannot be empirically invalidated. It seems that we can know the truth (or validity) of the principle independently of experience, and it does not seem to be open to empirically conditioned revision. Hence it does not seem to be a case of "non-conclusive a priori entitlement". So far it looks more like it is a case of "conclusive" a priori entitlement. I argue that the reason for this is more likely to be found in the character of radical interpretation than in any epistemologically decisive analysis of the relation between mind and world. Radical interpretation is a thought experiment, and since the principle of charity is a principle that has its place within

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[20] This result is of course already a possibility within radical interpretation, due to the thesis of the indeterminacy of interpretation, but then the reason for the result is another.

this experiment, it is only doubtfully open to empirical revision. If we on this basis hold that the principle is a priori, it would not be directly false, but it would be misleading and perhaps also irrelevant. I moreover maintain that it is generally problematic to separate the empirical from the a priori in an epistemically significant manner within Davidson's theory, since further support for such a separation is lacking. On the contrary, Davidson's thinking has been built upon a denial of the epistemic importance of such dualisms. The realization of this point has been one of the main sources for my overall reading of Davidson as a naturalist. Having found that it is very doubtful that the principle of charity can be ascribed the status of synthetic apriori, or transcendental, the epistemic status of the principle is hence not a hindrance for a naturalistic doctrine of gradualism.

Furthermore, I find it characteristic that the thought experiment of radical interpretation is not about ideal and prefigurative interpreters and speakers. However, "The omniscient interpreter" is a figure once brought in by Davidson.[21] Later, he has considered this a big mistake.[22] Even so I would say that the fact that the figure could turn up in Davidson's thinking at all shows that his philosophy has developed in the reach between transcendentalism and naturalism. However, I consider the fact that the figure had a very brief appearance as a confirming fact of my overall reading.

I conclude that the principle does not constitute the beliefs of either speakers or interpreters as true beliefs. The principle helps the interpreter in his construction of a theory about the beliefs and meanings of the speaker; it helps bringing about hypotheses about belief and meaning, but it is not in position to issue a warrant on the *truth* of the result. The *consistency* of the beliefs is, however, a direct result of the method.

6. Second Order Belief and Naturalism

Article 6, "Ascription of Belief and Second Order Belief", addresses interrelated intentional concepts such as belief, second order belief, truth, objective truth, subjective

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[21] In Davidson's "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1983), pp137-153 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.

[22] In Donald Davidson: "Reply to A.C. Genova" pp 192-194 in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, p. 192. Davidson admits: "If the case can be made with an omniscient interpreter, it can be made without, and better."

judgment and error. This means that this article, to a greater degree than the others, takes an internal perspective on intentionality, and, in particular, it raises the question of how a concept of objective truth is partly constituted from within intentionality. For this constitution, the question of the relation between a notion of belief and a notion of second order belief is of particular interest. I discuss four of Davidson's criteria for ascription of attitudes and give an account of his notion of belief.

Davidson's first criterion for ascription of belief is that in order to ascribe belief to somebody that belief has to be one belief in a set of beliefs. I interpret this as a methodologically based restriction on interpretation. This is based on an opposition between methodological and ontological restrictions. Also his fourth criterion, that in order to have the concept of belief, one must have language, is a methodologically based restriction. The notion of belief is characterized in detail, and some of the most important features are that a belief is "non-Platonist", in the sense that it demands a subject, a believer, and we are therefore personally connected to it and we have different degrees of faith in each of our beliefs. But a belief is not yet subjective, as it has a sentence as its representative. Due to the way beliefs are constituted, we can know that most beliefs in a set of beliefs are true, but a belief is still always hypothetical in the sense that it can, in principle, never be once and for all confirmed as a truth for neither the believer, nor for his interpreter. We can identify a belief due to its truth conditions and due to its place in a network of belief. This means that beliefs belong both to human assessing subjects and the world.

The criterion that I pay the most attention to in article 6 is the criterion that second order belief is necessary for having belief. Research on autistic disorders anticipates that there exists speaker's who have beliefs but lack second order belief. Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin take these autistic speakers to be counterexamples to the criterion that belief requires second order belief, and also to the claim that one cannot have beliefs unless one has the concept of objective truth. I argue that in order to establish the results of the research in psychology as a counterexample, one has to show that the concepts of belief involved in the research and in Davidson are sufficiently similar for a comparison to hold. Glüer and Pagin has not taken any steps in this direction, and I take it that it is highly doubtful that the sophisticated and specified concept of belief employed in Davidson's theory will be the

same as the one employed in psychological research, which probably will be correspondingly specified, albeit in other ways. Furthermore, when it comes to the lack of second order belief, I argue that deviant linguistic behavior (as shown by some autistic persons) is parasitic upon ordinary linguistic behavior reliant on second order belief (shown by non-autistic persons). As long as we take it that a community of autistic persons is unable to develop language from a pre-linguistic state, we must assume that the autistic persons benefit from having learned to speak in a non-autistic environment. Glüer and Pagin argue that if only autistic speakers of a linguistic community survive, the lack of counterexamples becomes a mere contingency. Contrary to this I argue that as long as the conditions for the development of language are not only metaphysical, but to a high degree biological, causal and demands an individual history of language acquisition in a society, this will be a part of our understanding of, and theorizing about, these speakers. I therefore disavow the claim that the existence of autistic speakers who lack second order belief is a counterexample to the criterion that belief requires second order belief, and I also disagree that this case is a counterexample to the claim that one cannot have beliefs unless one has the concept of objective truth.

Finally, I point out that as a criterion for ascription of propositional attitudes, second order belief is inevitable for interpretationism in epistemology. In order to interpret in accordance with the prescribed methodology, and in particular with the principle of charity, the creatures involved need to be able to assess their own and other people's beliefs. It is also vital for a constitution of the notion of objective truth from within intentionality.

When it comes to the question of the actual existence of second order beliefs in speakers, it could be said that, on the one hand; we should be able to know all that we can ever come to know about the beliefs of a speaker, from a third person point of view, according to the prescribed methodology of radical interpretation. On the other hand, Davidson claims that all believers *have* second order belief, but there is a question whether this could be available as a claim about the empirical existence of a particular state from a third person perspective. It seems to me that for an interpretationist it could only be available as a claim on a meta-level, in a theoretical reconstruction of interpretation, or, alternatively, as a theoretical presupposition in a thought experiment about interpretation. Therefore it could

seem as if interpretationism as a method dodges the question of the *existence* of second order belief, and that interpretationism therefore must renounce naturalization in the form of a justified or verified empirical existence in this case.

In article 6 I have again raised the question of whether first, the criterion of predication and second, the criterion of the other creature's predicated response to my predication are sufficient for having evidence that the other creature has the awareness of error. (This was the starting question for article 5.) In article 5 I suggested that disagreement should be the criterion for ascription of awareness of error, as this would be the only methodologically sound criterion from a behavioral point of view. Now it seems that we in article 6 have gotten yet another confirmation of the presumption that smooth communication is insufficient for having evidence that the other creature is in possession of awareness of error. We can see that there exist language users who are able to smoothly communicate, but who simultaneously are not aware of the possibility of error. However, it has turned out that this is not necessarily a counter-argument against the criterion of second order belief as a criterion for having belief.

7. Radical Interpretation, Naturalism and Empiricism

In article 1, "Radical Translation and Radical Interpretation", I go into differences between Quine and Davidson as concerns epistemology. Though both of them pursue naturalized epistemology in some sense, the article points out that naturalism need not be empiricism. Davidson agrees with Quine that epistemology should be a study of the relation between input and output, but he changes the study of this relation from a study of radical translation to a study of radical interpretation. I find that a difference between radical translation and radical interpretation is that in interpretation our aim is to understand another person, via a truth-theory for the speaker, while the aim of translation is to produce a translation manual, thereby bringing out whatever there could be to "stimulus meaning". Davidson's ambition of reaching understanding of the speaker, via a theory of meaning and belief, brought out by a truth theory, far exceeds the use Quine made of his radical translation. This means that Davidson had to go beyond holophrastic translation, over to analytic interpretation that could bring out semantic structure.

Another perspicuous difference between the two approaches lies in their ways of relating to the intentional. While Davidson uses the model of radical interpretation as a way of bringing about understanding of intentional phenomena and also willingly employ intentional concepts from the outset, I argue that Quine sees radical translation as a move away from the metaphysically loaded intentional concepts. The intentional concepts are thus, with Davidson, brought back to the stage, but now with the aim of ridding them from their heavy metaphysical baggage. However, as radical interpreters our observational apparatus for taking in the world is not equipped with notions like meaning. Thus, in this regard Davidson is in line with Quine. As interpreters we cannot appeal to such notions when they are supposed to be the outcome of the interpretational process. But it seems to me that Quine was never much interested in bringing a notion like meaning back into the vocabulary of his theory however restored to dignity it may have been. Somewhat reluctantly he did go as far as crediting us with a notion of stimulus meaning. But later he turned away from even this limited notion of meaning.

Let's quickly recapitulate the main methodological differences between radical translation and radical interpretation: Quine prescribes a methodology that starts out with the observation of linguistic behavior related to the speaker's immediate environment, thereby establishing patterns of connections between behavior and surroundings. Roughly, the best possible outcome of the process will be that the translator finds stimulus-meanings for occasion sentences that have a high degree of observationality, and that he also is able to translate the logical connectives. The stimulus meaning for a person's sentence is the ordered pair of affirmative and negative stimulus meaning, and "the stimulus meaning of a sentence for a subject sums up his disposition to assent to or dissent from the sentence in response to present stimulations."[23] On basis of this, and assumptions about "stimulus-analyticity" and "stimulus-contradiction", the radical interpreter can translate some of the speaker's sentences by correlating these with sentences of his own. In this way the translator can reach the aim of giving a translation manual for a speaker of an unknown language. This will in effect be a correlation of synonymous sentences. In radical interpretation the aim is to devise a theory of truth for the speaker. The radical interpreter starts to search for patterns of sentences that the speaker *holds true* (or holds false) systematically dependent on changes in the environment. (The corresponding attitude in

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[23] Willard Van Orman Quine: *Word and Object*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1960, p. 34.

radical translation would be prompted assent.) But since the interpreter has to go deeper into the structure of the language (and thus go *into* the sentences) in order to reveal the semantic structure of the language, he also has to employ more of his own logic, more of the structure of his own language, and more of his own system of belief in order to complete his mission than the translator had to do. Davidson therefore has to "apply the Principle of Charity across the board." When the interpreter has been successful, he has given a theory of truth for the language of the speaker, and the interpreter will then have an interpretation of the speaker's sentences, in the sense that he knows what the speaker means when uttering the sentences and he also knows the corresponding beliefs of the speaker. He thus understands the speaker, which means, among other things, that he can with some success predict his response to certain stimulations.

When trying to search out the epistemologically more *decisive* differences between Quine and Davidson, I have focused on their different views on the causes for beliefs. While Quine takes patterns of sensory stimulation to be the data on which translator and informant reacts, objects and events are the causes for beliefs and linguistic behavior in Davidson's theory. According to Quine the epistemological study of input and output would suffer if we take objects and events as the causes (or, as input), since the very process of reification is among the objects of his study. On the other hand, Quine eventually changed his mind about this in relation to translation and language learning. Quine came to hold the view that objects and events are the input in *these* connections, though not in the study of epistemology.

It has long been assumed that Davidson is a very loyal student of Quine's. Even though I, in article 1, agree with the claim, I argue that it is a truth with some very important and significant modifications. These modifications have motivated my article in the sense that I'm aiming at pinpointing the philosophical importance of the seemingly small and detailed differences between Quine's radical translation and Davidson's radical interpretation. I believe that if we want to understand what Davidson is up to, we must also understand what Quine is up to. But it would be a mistake to assume that Davidson had the same motivations and aims for his theorizing as had Quine. If we take Davidson's philosophy to be first and foremost a prolongation of Quine's, we shall be blind for Davidson's accomplishments. If we, on the other hand, fail to see Quine's enormous impact on

Davidson, we shall also be blinded in our reading of Davidson. My reading of some of the detailed differences of the two projects has revealed the substratum for Quine and Davidson's more decisively epistemologically different orientations. In particular, Davidson's focus on objects and truth (as opposed to Quine's focus on stimulation of nerve endings and evidence) has been at the core of their discussions over the years. I localize the origin for the epistemological differences between the two in Davidson's use of quantification in interpretation. However, to my knowledge, nobody has focused on the connection between this development in Davidson's theory, which had to come due to his shift to semantic theory, and the epistemological consequences of the shift. In article 1 I claim that the indeterminacy is less radical with Davidson's shift, and that ontological relativity to a large extent is precluded by the new approach to quantification. My contention is that the preclusion of ontological relativity is connected to Davidson's rejection of irritations on our sensory surface as the cause of our beliefs, or rather, his reliance on *socially* constituted objects and events.

There is a fundamental difference between Quine and Davidson when it comes to what is to count as a justification for a belief. For Quine, justification is what he calls "the tribunal of experience", which is something like a "court of justification" where experience is the jury and the judge. What we are given through our senses plays a particular role for our knowledge about the external world. From a Davidsonian perspective there is nothing wrong in letting our perceptions have a special position for our knowledge about the world. The problem, from the perspective of Davidson, is that Quine wants to give the causal influence from the world the status of epistemic justification for a belief. Davidson holds this to be impossible, and argues that only what is propositionally structured, i.e. a belief, can be a justification for something propositionally structured. What causally affects us is not propositionally structured, and cannot, according to Davidson, *justify* our beliefs.[24] This means that only what is or could be linguistically formed can count as justification of beliefs. The shift from sense perceptions to propositionally structured beliefs as justifiers for beliefs could seem to be a shift from a more naturalized to a less naturalized epistemology. It seems to be a turn away from non-normative empirical input to normative

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[24] Roger Gibson argues against this in his "Quine on the Naturalizing of Epistemology", in P. Leonardi and M. Santambrogio (eds.): *On Quine*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995. He is offering an interesting argument for an interpretation of Quine that possibly could accommodate Davidson's requirement. See pp 96-98. However, it would take us too far off the track to give an account of this here.

and already-intentional input. If Davidson had upheld Quine's view concerning input as evidence, this would clearly be a problem, and Davidson's position would be one of idealism.

Even though radical translation was designed first and foremost for epistemological purposes, Quine also used his thought experiment for throwing light on language acquisition and for saying something about what meaning is *not*. In the article I point out that Quine eventually changed his mind about the proximal stimulus when it came to semantics, and agreed with Davidson that the distal stimulus were the relevant stimulus in this connection.

However, on the question of the *basis* for intersubjective similarity, Quine and Davidson differ yet again. While Quine holds that the similarity is based in pre-established harmony, and parallelism, Davidson holds that the similarity has its basis in common dispositions among humans, and in the exchange of linguistic descriptions of the world in the process of triangulation. My interpretation of Davidson in article 1 is neither congenial to idealism, nor to transcendentalism or empiricism. His position represents a non-reductive version of naturalism.

8. Naturalism and The Social

In article 2, "Davidson and the Role of Error" I took up Davidson's views upon non-conceptual aspects of experience, and especially the question of whether the non-conceptual can form a basis for knowledge. The approach to the problem was given from the occasion to which the paper were written, a symposium on "The Non-Conceptual Aspects of Experience" in Melbu in 2000. In the article I lay out Davidson's model of interpretation in triangulation, and I do this without presupposing that the reader is familiar with the model. There are examples that are of some value, and in the article I raise a number of issues that are treated more carefully in later articles. The article emphasizes that according to Davidson, the social relates to naturalism, and it stresses that the social is based in evolution and human nature.

When writing article 2 I took it for granted that in Davidson's model "the correction of wrong beliefs is going on all the time".[25] Later, when I wrote article 4, "The Explanation of Error", I had come to see that the kind of correction that I had been counting on, and, in particular, the correction from other speakers than the one interpreted, couldn't actually have a place in the model. In radical interpretation an interpreter interprets the language of a certain speaker at a given interval of time. A theory of truth for the speaker's language can be different from one day to the next, and any theory of truth for the language of a speaker will only relate to the particular speaker. The time-limited idiolect, structured in the form of a theory of truth, is the only form of a language that one can have in radical interpretation. My conclusion is that the radical interpretational process does not allow for social checks, and the social aspect is only made relevant in ostensive learning.

An important Davidsonian issue in a discussion of the role of the non-conceptual is the question of the conceptual versus the propositional. According to Davidson the conceptual is always already propositional, because we judge when we categorize parts of the world into this or that conceptual category. What is conceptual is also propositional. According to Davidson it is not "experience", but objects and events in the world that can cause beliefs in us. Beliefs are what knowledge consists of, and Davidson would say that conceptual knowledge is all that can be considered to be knowledge. I argue this means that Davidson has no place for something non-conceptual that can form a basis for knowledge, and neither can a notion of "experience" have a place in his theory - that is, if experience is supposed to be something intended as a basis for knowledge. Davidson would admit that there are non-conceptual aspects of our experience, but would most clearly deny that this can be said to form a basis for knowledge. It seems to me that the non-conceptual must be conceptualized in order to be relevant for conceptual knowledge in the interpretational model, and if it cannot be conceptualized, then it cannot be relevant, since it cannot be brought in as part of our network of belief.

I bring in the notion of error for the first time in article 2, and I connect it to Davidson's rejection of skepticism. I show how a notion of error is meaningful only where there are normativity or rules for correctness. This means that in order to employ a notion of error within the intentional, one must be able to connect it to truth and falsity, and to a notion of

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[25] Article 2, p. 36.

belief. While belief is how we take things to be, truth is the way in which things are, and if we believe that things are different than they are, we have a false belief. We are thus mistaken, and we are in error. In order to be in error in this particular sense, one must be an intentional, linguistic creature, according to Davidson. In article 4 I have followed up this lead and I there provide a more thorough treatment of the problem of error.

Furthermore, I raise the question of how we can know whether or not a creature is capable of making error or mistake in our sense. If a creature is not in possession of a distinction between truth and falsity, it is not aware of the possibility of making a mistake of our kind. The difference is a difference between having a disposition and having a concept. Davidson has argued that awareness of the possibility of error is sufficient for ascription of thought. Simultaneously he has argued that exchange of propositional contents is needed in order for intentional creatures to be able to take advantage of the ability to triangulate their shared world. In the article I question the possibility that we can know that a creature is intentional unless it can disagree with us. Further investigation into this question is carried out in article 5.

In article 2, moreover, I defend Davidson's view on the relation between thought and world against criticism directed against this view by John McDowell. McDowell holds that Davidson's picture is that we cannot get outside our beliefs, and that Davidson thus is a coherentist at bottom. As long as Davidson admits only of the world's causal impact on us, McDowell holds, our empirical thinking is "engaged in with no rational constraint [] from outside"[26] This would imply that our interaction with the world is epistemologically insignificant. I argue that McDowell has overlooked the role that society plays in Davidson's model of triangulation. Thought and language are, according to Davidson, both interpersonal from the start, and without an upbringing in a society of language users, we would not come to be in possession of the awareness of error. Davidson and McDowell agree that if something should be in position to be a reason for a belief, this something must have propositional structure, and that "the relation of epistemic support requires that both relata have propositional content".[27] This means that (parts of) the world would have to be propositionally structured should it be in position to justify our beliefs about the

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[26] Article 2, p. 42ff.
[27] Ibid, p. 46.

world. While McDowell affirms this, Davidson denies the possibility of a propositionally structured world.

In article 2 I stress the question of how the social relates to naturalism in Davidson's philosophy. I argue that the social, according to Davidson, is based in evolution and human nature, in the sense that we as humans are genetically disposed to discriminate the world in specific ways. Though this is the basis for discrimination, and thus for thought and language, we must, according to Davidson, also be taught to discriminate in more fine-grained ways in a linguistic society in order to be speakers. This means that *the basis* for our common ways of discriminating the world; ways that are socially (or intersubjectively) established, is our dispositions. The social establishment of belief and meaning, and thus, the cultural, has in this sense an empirical basis in human biology.

9. The Dialogical in the Social and Naturalism

Article 5, "Error and the Teacher-learner-object Triangle", emphasize the way that language and thought, and thus also the social, is genuinely dialogical. The article takes on a narrower approach to the problem of error than do any of the other articles. I address a situation of language learning and more specified, a triangular situation involving a full-fledged user of language who is communicating with a creature that is not yet a full-fledged language user. I'm asking what an explanation of *awareness of the possibility of* error (mistake from a person's own point of view) would amount to. An explanation of awareness of the possibility of error would be an explanation on the level of an idiolect, which means that it will be on the level of an individual language user. Awareness of the possibility of error in other minds, and the question of how to identify such awareness is therefore a more specified problem than the general problem of explaining error. How can we, from a third person point of view, justify to ourselves the difference between a learner who *is* and a learner who *is not* aware of error? And how could such a difference emerge in the triangular situation?

Davidson holds that creatures that intentionality inhabits are themselves aware of the possibility that their beliefs could be false, or in error, which means that they are aware that they could be deviating from the norm. He says that "The point is not to identify the norm,

but to make sense of there being a norm, and this has been done if we can point to the differences between the preponderance of cases where the creatures respond alike and the deviant cases where they diverge. I insisted that it is not sufficient that a third party is able to observe or describe these two cases; I have claimed it is necessary that the existence of the contrast is available to the creatures themselves. This essential element enters the triangle when the creatures observe each other's reactions to the very phenomena they are observing".[28] This means that in order to ascribe intentionality and a grasp of the distinction between truth and falsity to another being, we have to know, or at the least we have to have some reasons for assuming, that the creature has a mind, and that he or she is able to read other minds. Both parties in the triangle thus have to possess awareness of the possibility of error. However, we do not find *evidence* that the other has a mind in the triangular situation itself. What we do find in triangulation are necessary *conditions* for creatures to be thinkers and mind readers. When or how could we then produce evidence that the other creature is thinking? Davidson assumes that when the other creature speaks such that we can understand, and thus predicates, we have a sufficient reason to assume that it has a mind. When we respond to the other's utterances and he or she can respond back such that we have good reasons for assuming they have understood us, we also have good reasons to assume that they are mind readers. According to Davidson, smooth communication is a criterion. But are these criteria, that of predication and that of the other creature's predicated response to my predication, sufficient for having evidence that the other creature has the awareness of error? The question is how we can identify awareness of error.

First, there is the question of the emergence of awareness of error for a creature that still hasn't got it, but whom we assume will be disposed for developing such awareness. I assume that a learner will be unable to become aware of the possibility that something predicated by him or her could be wrong only on basis of corrections from the teacher. My suggestion is to introduce a second teacher, such that the teacher-vertex includes two full-fledged speakers in discussion. Without a second teacher the learner will hold the teacher to be infallible, and the teacher will not be in position to function as a role model for the learner when it comes to awareness of error. When two people discuss, I maintain, it is

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[28] Donald Davidson: "Externalisms" (1996) pp 1-16 in *Interpreting Davidson*, ed. P. Kotatko, P. Pagin and G. Segal, CSLI Publications, Stanford 2001, p. 5.

more likely that a learner will be in position to understand that one of them can be wrong, and I argue that this is the model for the assumption of error in oneself.

When two people discuss, for instance, what the right description of some phenomenon is, the child is able to understand that error of the meaning-kind is possible, as well as error of the belief-kind. When the two (for the child) authoritative persons use words in different ways, the child can get the idea that employment of norms is up for discussion. Admission to the disagreements of several authoritative persons is important for the learner. Here I presume that disagreement over norms can be apprehended before one is in possession of norms. Understanding that there are several possible understandings of the same phenomena means getting a grip on a hypothetical relation to world and language.

My second suggestion in article 5 is intended to meet the demand for evidence of the learner's awareness of the possibility of error. The suggestion is that in order for the teacher to know that the learner is in possession of error, the learner must be able to disagree with the teacher. He must be able to doubt and question the teacher's account. In order to be certain that this is what the learner does, the learner must be able to give descriptions and accounts that can compete with accounts given by the teacher.

Now, as long as Davidson demands the awareness of error to be internal to the creatures themselves in order for them to be in possession of error, one could always say that evidence from a third person point of view is not required. The criterion could in this way be said to be internal to each and every creature, and one could argue that behavioral evidence of awareness of error is therefore irrelevant. This is obviously a respectable stand, but the question is whether or not this is consistent with Davidson's overall strategy for epistemology. According to Davidson, the study of how we acquire knowledge should be carried out from a third person perspective. If this strategy is to be carried out in the triangular situation with teacher and learner, the teacher must, from his point of view, be able to effectively recognize the difference between learners in possession of the awareness and those without. This means that my suggestion takes this methodological predicament at face value, and pushes the methodological strategy further than Davidson's original suggestion. I will maintain that whatever the result may be, we will learn something from it. We could either find that the strategy has its limits in the sense that it becomes

meaningless in actual cases, or that we must strengthen the methodology as a strategy for future studies. I maintain that my attempt here shows we can go on with the strategy, and that it is a useful tool that we can strengthen and apply to a wider range of cases.

There is also another way of approaching the question of awareness of error. Davidson holds that unless a creature has beliefs, neither can he make a mistake, from his own point of view. In his "Problems in the Explanation of Action", Davidson mentions an example with a tribe of monkeys.[29] The members of this tribe respond to the threat of danger by emitting a certain cry, and other members respond as to danger when they hear this cry. If now a monkey shouts out the danger cry when no danger is present, and another monkey reacts as to danger, *we* would surely say that a mistake occurred. Davidson's point here is that "...unless the monkeys *believe* there is danger when there is not, no error has been committed; they have simply responded to a stimulus that usually, but not always, accompanies danger." He thus holds that unless we can say that intention and belief are present, no concept of mistake can apply. In this regard I have said that we cannot be in a methodological position to ascertain ourselves that intention and belief are present in a creature unless we can communicate with it. And Davidson's point is that we don't have to attribute intentions or beliefs to the monkeys in order to explain their behavior. But as I read him, his point is *not* that the monkeys don't have beliefs. We simply cannot know whether or not they do have beliefs. Neither do we have to ascribe certain beliefs to them in order to understand their behavior. The concept of mistake does not, then, apply to a creature that could not itself be aware of the possibility of error. Another of Davidson's ways of putting this is the following: "So far as I can see, no account of error that depends on the classifications we find most natural, and counts what deviates from such as error, will get at the essence of error, which is that the creature itself must be able to recognize error. A creature that has a concept knows that the concept applies to things independently of what it believes."[30]

A theory of knowledge that can give an account of "thought as objective" has to give an account of error. This is a prerequisite for us to be able to distinguish between having a

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[29] Donald Davidson: "Problems in the Explanation of Action" (1987) pp 101-116 in Donald Davidson: *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 116.
[30] Donald Davidson: "What Thought Requires" (2001) pp 135-150 in his *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 141.

concept (and thereby being able to recognize an error), and having a disposition. Creatures with only dispositions does not have a concept of objectivity, a distinction between truth and falsity, and a distinction between going on in correct versus incorrect ways. Such a theory will also have to give some directions showing *how* we can identify a mistake *as* a mistake. (One of the reasons for this is that we should expect a theory of the Davidsonian brand to give behavioral criteria for its theoretical entities / phenomena.) Telling how to identify a mistake *as* a mistake must be one of the aims of the theory, but this need not be more mysterious than explaining the reasons for our beliefs and thus also the reasons for specific mistakes.

"We are built to discriminate objects, to keep track of them, expect them to emerge from their holes or behind trees, and in some cases to feed or eat us. But these finely tuned abilities are not the same as thinking of things as objects and events. This demands the apparatus of propositional thoughts with truth conditions and the awareness of possible error. I don't think of the awareness of possible error as an abstract cautionary warning; it takes shape rather in the light of the reasons we have and can give for our beliefs, and therefore the explanations we can give of specific mistakes. Perception is propositional: when we look or feel or hear we believe."[31]

This also means that an account of error needs to be a part of a general unified theory of meaning and action. And here we have reached a simplification of my approach to the problem of error. Throughout my work on the articles I have related to Davidson's theory of interpretation in the form of a theory of meaning. Instead of the ascription of truth conditions to the speaker's individual sentences, as the theory of meaning instructs the interpreter to perform, the interpreter is in the unified theory of meaning and action to look for (the assumed observable notion of) the speaker's valuing the truth of one sentence more than the truth of another. Therefore I have not commented upon the ways in which my approach to the problem of error can work within a unified theory or not. As noted in the introduction, I have in general assumed that the extension of the theory is inessential to the problems that I am dealing with. However, in order to answer the question of error within the unified theory properly, one would have to pursue analyses further.

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[31] Davidson in his "Reply to Dagfinn Føllesdal" in Lewis Edwin Hahn (Ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, in the series The Library of Living Philosophers, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1999, p. 731.

In article 5 there are two demands, or methodological assumptions, that we can directly relate to a Davidsonian version of naturalism. The first is the demand that we should be able to tell – from a third person point of view – whether or not the speaker has awareness of error. The general demand for a third person approach to epistemology is by Davidson spoken of as one out of two features of Quine's naturalized epistemology he wishes to continue to pursue. My demand in this article, connected to the first suggestion, is therefore clearly a demand that is naturalized in spirit, according to this mentioned understanding of naturalized epistemology. The other feature in article 5 that relates to this version of naturalism is the idea that disagreement (related to my second suggestion) is a condition for having a hypothetical relation to world and language. Such a hypothetical relation to world and language is another side of fallibilism, which I have deemed a core naturalistic conviction.

Now, we have summed up many of the main points, arguments and results of the 6 articles here presented, and more or less explicitly related it to naturalism and naturalized epistemology. I will not provide a general summary of what naturalism can be in Davidson's approach to knowledge, as I hope it is has become sufficiently clear by now. But a crucial point deserves focus, and that is the question of whether there are structures, conditions and presuppositions in Davidson's philosophy that are non-congenial to his version of naturalism. According to my analyses, there can be no structures, conditions or principles with a fundamentally different epistemic status within his philosophy, and this means that all structures, conditions or principles will have to be gradual and fallible. It thus seems that Davidson's philosophy has a clear profile in terms of epistemology.

There is, however, another feature in Davidson's thinking that has come to seem less congenial to his main lines of thought: the notion of truth. I have asked whether this is due to the metaphysical pretensions of truth, and this is in particular so for the notion of objective truth. The idea of objective truth seems to be transcending a naturalized approach to knowledge. Another way of talking about the difference between a metaphysically innocent notion of truth (here; just "truth") and a more heavily metaphysically loaded notion of truth (here; "objective truth"), is the distinction between "believed true" and "true". Thus, in the final three chapters of this synthesis we will look further into this question.

10. The Gap Between "Believed True" and "True"

In more recent publications Davidson has admitted to a connection between what he has termed "the distal theory of reference"[32] and the problem of explaining error. In his posthumously published *Truth and Predication*, he talks about this as "the crucial gap between what is believed true and what is true" and notes that the problem is crucial "since the distal theory directly relates truth to belief".

Davidson points out that "The ultimate source of both objectivity and communication is the triangle that, by relating speaker, interpreter and the world, determines the contents of thought and speech. Given this source, there is no room for a relativized concept of truth."[33] This means that Davidson holds that a non-relativized concept of truth, presumably then a concept of "objective truth", is to have its source in triangulation. He continues by stating that truth must also be related to "the attitudes of rational creatures" and that this relation springs from the nature of interpersonal understanding, in short; it is to be found in mutual interpretation. "Linguistic communication, the indispensable instrument of fine-grained interpersonal understanding, rests on mutually understood utterances, the contents of which are finally fixed by the patterns and causes of sentences held true."[34] In one sense, it *could* seem that the determination of causes of beliefs taking place in triangulation is, anyhow, the ultimate source for the concept of objective truth, according to Davidson's most recent text. He further notes that the "conceptual underpinning of interpretation is a theory of truth" and that truth therefore rests "in the end on belief". I take these statements to indicate that a concept of objective truth still relies on *both* its external constitution through triangulation and its internal constitution through the circle of interdefined intentional notions. But Davidson also points to truth in the form of an empirical theory of truth for speaker S in a language L at a time T, and such a theory can only be realized if believers exist in the first place. So, for one, *truth* will only exist where believers exist, and two, it seems the *objectivity* of truth ultimately rests on the determination of the contents of thought in triangulation. So, there is still somehow a gap between believed true and what is true. Hence, it seems that we, with Davidson's theory, have a good grip on "believed true" trough interpretationism, and this is what makes truth

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[32] Donald Davidson: *Truth and Predication*, Harvard University Press, 2005, article 3, "The Content of the Concept of Truth", p. 64 and 65.
[33] Ibid, p. 75.
[34] Ibid.

interesting for us as knowers, but, on the other hand, "what *is* true" seems to be only *partially* secured trough interpretation in triangulation. I have argued that the reason for this is that the social check cannot be performed in interpretation in the triangular mood.[35]

However, as I noted in article 4, we could either give up the quest for objective truth, or we could give up the idiolect as the basis for interpretation. There are many reasons why Davidson could not give up the idiolect. For one, it is intrinsic to the model of radical interpretation, and it is intrinsic to Davidson's theory also in certain other respects. Time-limited idiolect as the notion of language to relate to in radical interpretation is connected to the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. When we as interpreters restrict ourselves to a person and a time for interpretation, and we also operate alone as interpreters, we avoid the confrontation with the indeterminacy of translation. *Another interpreter* would be able to come up with another theory, we would on *another occasion* be able to come up with another theory about the beliefs and meanings of *the same speaker*, and we would certainly be able to come up with another theory for *another speaker* at *the same time*. This is why we have to make radical interpretation local, since going global means anarchy, that is, when we take it on the premises of interpretationism. The thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, which I believe is a crucial insight we have no choice but to accept, is therefore a second and separate reason why we could not give up the idiolect without devastating changes to the model of radical interpretation. It thus seems that there still has to be a gap between "believed true" and "true".

In order to look at the problem from another quarter, let's look at the basic situation of radical interpretation. In radical interpretation we start out with an assumption about what *some specific speaker* holds true and ends up with a theory of truth for the *language* he or she speaks, a theory of truth which serves as an empirical theory of meaning for the language. We start out knowing that:

(A) Kari holds true-in-L "It is raining" if and only if it is raining in her vicinity,

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[35] In article 5 I suggested that an extension of the teacher-learner-object triangle with a third participant, a second competent person, would solve the problem of explaining how a learner could get the idea that error is possible. The possibility for a general extension of the triangle with two speaker-interpreters *could* be a way out of the predicament. However, in this synthesis there is no room for further research on this question.

This being our only "evidence" for the T-sentence:

(B) "It is raining" is true-in-L if and only if it is raining in the vicinity of the speaker [36]

The question is, of course, why we are entitled to infer (B) from (A), if we assume that the language L is a language such as Norwegian or German; in short, if we assume an ordinary everyday use of the term language. Even if it is true that Kari holds true the specific sentence (due to what she believes and what the sentence means) under the appropriate circumstances, how can we know that she is not mistaken? It seems that even if Kari believes a truth, sentence (B) could still be false. The inference from the fact of a speaker holding the sentence true in L to the fact of the sentence being true in L needs support, or at the least we have to explain how we got from (A) to (B). The problem has basically two "solutions": one is the principle of charity and the other is causality in triangulation. The principle of charity lets me assume that the speaker has the same beliefs as me (the interpreter), and since I believe the obvious, that it is raining when I see or feel rain, I assume that so does the speaker. In the situation of triangulation I can observe that the speaker is being caused to believe what she believes (which she then utters in a sentence) by the relevant object, event or situation present, and I can check the correctness of my ascription by further questions. But, as I have argued, the interpreter cannot reach out to the objective truth and thus neither to the intersubjectively established linguistic norms trough radical interpretation in triangulation.

However, according to Davidson, the interpreter can take in public standards in the form of a "plurality of private belief structures". (Ref) This is, according to him, "What makes a social theory of interpretation possible" and fortunately, "belief is built to take up the slack between sentences held true by individuals and sentences true (or false) by public standards." (Ref) But can belief solve the problem of error? Can it bridge the gap between idiolect and the correction or input from society? It does not seem so, since a plurality of private belief structures is not what the interpreter has to go on in *radical* interpretation. If interpretation were non-radical this could perhaps have been a possible solution.

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[36] The phrasing of the example is borrowed from Simon Evnine's *Donald Davidson*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1991, p. 101.

We could ask if there is a problem, from Davidson's point of view, in going from interpretation of idiolects or sets of idiolects to interpretation of whole languages? Is there even an entity that can, in an ordinary, everyday sense, be called a language in Davidson's theory? After all, "...there is no such thing as a language..." was the rhetorical punch line of his "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs".[37] The concept of language in use is, however, quickly specified as "a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases".[38] So, there is no such thing as a clearly defined structure to be acquired and then applied to cases. Rules are not static, objective or conventional. Rules are not what fix meanings. Or, to restate it with another of Davidson's articles, there is no scheme-content division to be had simultaneously with a view of the world as given. Schemes are not relative to content and concepts are not relative to scheme - at the least not while a constant and given world is simultaneously presupposed. Just as rules aren't fixing meanings, schemes aren't fixing worlds. Rules as well as schemes are in a state of relative and relatively slow flux. But, even though there is no language in the form of a clearly defined structure that could be acquired and applied to cases, it seems that we have to reach out for a concept of language that includes more than two speakers.

Davidson has a thesis concerning the impossibility of massive error about the world (which includes a thesis about the impossibility of massive error in our empirical beliefs), a thesis that has had a somewhat unclear status within Davidson's own thinking. He never had a watertight argument for the thesis, and it came to the fore due to work on other problems. In the beginning (especially in his "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics" from 1977) the thesis rested partly on the necessity for applying the principle of charity in interpretation.[39] This means that the principle of charity was a vital, although partial, basis for anti-skepticism about the world. Later, in the eighties and the nineties, with the development of a conception of triangulation, the thesis came to rest more on the circumstance that the content of our beliefs can be individuated based on their normal causes, in such a way that we have something close to a warrant that most of our empirical beliefs are true. This means beliefs are partly constituted by the causes to those beliefs. Simultaneously, the function of the principle of charity as constitutive for beliefs and for the thesis of the

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[37] Donald Davidson: "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" pp 433-446 in E. LePore: *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, p. 446.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Donald Davidson: "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics" (1977) pp 199-214 in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984.

impossibility of massive error is upheld. On the other hand, there is also the thesis that most of a speaker's beliefs are true; hence, truth in belief. The question is, again, whether a thesis about the impossibility of massive error, or alternatively, a thesis about the massive truth of the beliefs of speakers (whether this follows from the principle of charity or from triangulation) is consistent with Davidson's thorough hypothetical relation to the world. I would say that, in Davidson's approach, the closest we can come to truth is the ascription of "holding true" to a speaker, combined with the interpreter's following competent, but hypothetical assumption that what is *held* true, *is* true. This means that the speaker's and the interpreter's gradual subjective beliefs about their own beliefs is the arbitrator of the question of the extent to which something is true. The basis is, of course, roughly secured through mutual interpretation of common surroundings, but the truth of beliefs, in an absolute manner, cannot be secured through the methodology of interpretation.

11. Recapitulation of Conditions for Objective Truth

What does an externalist theory of knowledge have to do to show that there is an intrinsic connection between thought and the world (such that it can show that thought is objective)?

According to Davidson it has to:

1. Give an account of the contents of perceptual beliefs

2. Give an account of when two thoughts are the same

3. Give an account of how the content (however it is determined) is recognized as the same from one occasion to another

4. Give us a way to isolate the right cause, the cause of the perceptual belief. (The normal cause.)

5. Give an account of error, so that we can distinguish between having a concept and having a disposition

6. Tell us how we can identify a mistake as a mistake.

These are obviously what Davidson takes to be the necessary and sufficient conditions that an externalist theory of knowledge has to fulfill in order to show that there is an intrinsic connection between thought and the world, and to thus show that thoughts about the world can be objectively true. Which out of these conditions has his theory met, and which has

the theory not been able to meet? He seems to have been able to give an account of (1.) the contents of perceptual beliefs, as he hold that the content is directly related to the objects and events that caused our perceptual beliefs, and we can identify their contents partly on this basis, and partly based on the location of the belief within the net of beliefs. How we know that (2.) two thoughts are the same is accounted for by the methodology of interpretation, and it is the principle of charity that describes how this is done. We take our own system of beliefs as a model, and we then hold the speaker's beliefs constant while solving for meaning. That (3.), the content is recognized as the same from one occasion to another, is accounted for by our dispositions to categorize empirical similarities similarly within the human race. This is something that we just do, as a statistical matter of fact, and it is therefore not normative. The way of isolating the right cause (4.) is the way of triangulation. Davidson seems to sometimes say that we *do* manage to isolate the right cause by crossing causal lines, but more often he seems to hold that we can do this *only* when we are speakers and thereby can correlate each other's reactions. The basis for our success in isolating the right cause is our disposition to categorize the world in similar ways, and our triangular social activity comes as a necessary "second step" (explanatorily, it is not a two-step process in time). Anyway, as we *are* speakers, we can take advantage of our ability to share reactions.[40] According to Davidson, he has not been able to (5.) give a complete account of error, and (6.) neither has he identified a way in which we can identify a mistake as a mistake. However, as concerns these two last conditions, he has pointed to society in the form of the second person.

I do share Davidson's intuitions about the solution to the problem of the externalist theory of knowledge. However, in the list of conditions to be fulfilled, Davidson does not list the demand that the theory can tell us how we can identify a *non-mistaken* belief. This demand could either be read as a demand that the belief is justified (that we have evidence for it) *or* that it is true. The reason why Davidson has not listed this demand together with the others is that he would say that the truth of a single belief couldn't be guaranteed, even though we can know that most of the beliefs of a speaker must be true. The demand for truth cannot be objective as seen from the inside of radical interpretation. The problem is, however, that in order to cash out a notion of knowledge we must demand minimally that the belief is

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[40] Not all would agree that Davidson has been able to give a way to isolate the right cause of a conceptual belief. Kathrin Glüer and Ingar Brinck have on some occasions raised such misgivings, but I will here not go into their reasons for saying this.

justified, or, maximally, that it is true. And Davidson demands objective truth. He would hold that the process of content-determination gives as good a justification as we could get in this direction. But it does not give objective truth. And objective truth is most certainly what Davidson years for. Quine doesn't, and thus never run into this problem.

12. Quine, Davidson and Knowledge

Quine has rejected the view that knowledge is a mental state.[41] In opposition to this view, Quine holds that "knowing is a hybrid of warranted belief, which is mental, and truth, which is not."[42] Now, Davidson has no notion of "warranted belief". His notion of belief is instead a notion in which the warrant is intrinsic to the very concept. Davidson talks about this as "the veridicality of belief", which means that it is the nature of belief to be veridical, or "probably true". The veridicality of belief is, however, not present at the level of individual beliefs; it is rather a feature of a net of beliefs that most of the beliefs in it must be true. As far as I am able to figure out, Davidson uses the notion of "knowledge about the world" in the same ways as he uses the notion of "belief about the world". If this assumption of mine is correct, evidence, or warrant, is not a feature that can be analytically extracted from Davidson notion of knowledge, since it cannot be extracted from the notion of belief. But is it otherwise probable that Davidson could subscribe to Quine's view on what it is to know? Truth could not be reduced to warranted belief, according to Davidson. Davidson would agree that what is known must be true, and he holds that there must be some connection between belief and truth. More specifically, he holds that "belief can serve as the human attitude that connects a theory of truth to human concerns."[43]

It seems to me that Quine's expression of knowing as a hybrid goes well along with interpretationism. Thus the notion of knowledge has two sides: an internal consisting of what Quine labels mental, and which Davidson simply would call a belief, and an external side being truth. Truth is indeed not mental, even though Davidson *has* shown how to constitute the notion of truth partially from the inside of intentionality. Truth is partly internal, according to my distinction between the internal and the external side of

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[41] In "Response to Gibson" in Alex Orenstein and Petr Kotatko (Eds.) *Knowledge, Language, and Logic: Questions for Quine*, pp 414-415, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 2000.
[42] Ibid, p. 415.
[43] Davidson, Donald: "Epistemology and Truth", (1988) pp 177-191 in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, p. 189.

intentionality, but it is not mental. Truth is, however, *also* partly external. The notion of truth, and indeed the notion of objective truth, is based on the attempt at an explanation of the notion itself via processual aspects of triangulation. I have argued that the model of triangulation in radical interpretation suffers from the absence of continual correction via the society since the societal influence can only come in by ostensive learning. This is due to radical interpretation's restrictive concept of language, the idiolect, and the connection between this restriction and the external constitution of a notion of objective truth. In order to establish a notion of objective truth via the model of triangulation, we need to be able to perform a social check for error. My contention hence is that this is impossible due to the methodological restrictions laid down in the individually oriented model of radical interpretation. We thus need a community-based notion of language, or alternatively, we could give up objective truth.

Davidson assumes, however, that an account of knowledge can be built upon an account of belief. An account of belief, or a theory of belief, is the fallout of the theory of meaning, which is given in the form of a theory of truth for a given speaker at a given time, as interpreted by a fellow speaker. Thus, according to Davidson, knowledge, like belief and meaning, is dependent on linguistic interaction between speaker-interpreters.[44] The theory of belief for a speaker, or a speaker's net of beliefs, is hence to be the basis for an account of knowledge. But how could such an account aspire to a substantial concept of knowledge without a substantial concept of truth? And, perhaps Davidson should be content with giving an account of belief. The question is thus whether Davidson is able to meet the demands an account of knowledge on his own terns would require. A description of the gradual confidence in our own and other people's belief, and other people's gradual confidence in their own and our belief, is of vital importance for understanding how we as humans relate to the world. And this might be all we can give in terms of a theory of

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[44] In a short piece called "On Quine's philosophy" in *Theoria*, Vol. 60, 1994, pp 184-192, Davidson raises the question of consequences of the by Quine admitted irrelevance of stimulus meaning to translation. Davidson asks; "how are we now to think of the relation between theory of meaning and epistemology?" Davidson suggests that Quine, along with himself, "accept the account of belief that [] necessarily falls out of Quine's theory of meaning, and build the account of knowledge on this basis. In this case thought and knowledge, like meaning, would depend on linguistic interaction between agents." (p. 192) This advice from Davidson is of course based on the fact that Quine eventually had admitted that distal stimuli should be the basis for translation and language learning, while he still wanted to stick to proximal stimuli in the case of his epistemological study.

knowledge, at the least when we base ourselves on a methodological frame of interpretation.

13. Normativity and Regularity of Behavior

Triangulation takes away the illusion that the one part has got something that is definite, some "static semantic competence"[45]; in other words, that the one part has the definite key that the other one is trying to decipher. This is the reason why regularity of behavior is not equivalent to normativity. And this is the answer to Richard Rorty's question "What could normativity be, except regularities of behavior?"[46] I would say that the mental is normative because regularities of behavior can and will be interpreted in different ways by different people, and there is no way around this "fact of interpretation".[47] The reason why intentional action is normative is that we have to employ our own norms in order to grasp the attitudes of those creatures that we try to understand. That thoughts are assessable is a hindrance for saying that normativity *is* regularity of behavior.

What would Davidson say about Rorty's question? As I read him, normativity is not something *in addition to* action, causality, behavior and regularity of behavior. Normativity is all about making sense of intentional behavior; it is ultimately about the meaning that lies in such behavior and in this activity we cannot reach outside our own norms. My contention is that a Davidsonian understanding of the question of the relation between normativity and behavior is such that normativity is supervening on behavior. This means that regularity of behavior is necessary for normativity to emerge, but it does not mean that normativity is nothing but patterns of behavior.

It is also meaningful to ask what one possibly can mean by the term "behavior" as it is applied in the initial question that Rorty posed. Behavior as not interpreted or non-normative would amount to "movement" or "motion". When asking such a question one seems to presuppose that behavior is something that can be described in physicalist

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[45] This is Bjørn Ramberg's formulation of it, in his *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language*, Blackwell, Oxford 1989, p. 78.

[46] Rorty posed this question as a comment upon my paper "Davidson, Naturalism and Constitutivity" in the seminar "Issues in Contemporary Metaphilosophy" in Tromsø, December 2001. It has haunted my thoughts ever since.

[47] This is one of the reasons why there will always be an indeterminacy of interpretation.

vocabulary, and of course it can. But he who asks such a question would also presuppose that human behavior is merely (or first and foremost) physical movement, and this is not compatible with Davidson's view.

What makes mere cow-reactions into a concept of cow? According to Davidson the transition takes place when the base line becomes as thick as language. I will answer Rorty's question on basis of what I have learned from my work on these articles. If there is regularity of behavior, assessed by an interpreter on basis of relevant similarity between speaker's reactions and interpreter's reactions, then assessment is already in the picture. Assessment that there is or is not regularity demands that we ascribe certain beliefs to the speaker, and this could not be done without also ascribing meanings, and we have therefore interpreted the speaker already when we judge that there is regularity of behavior. This demands that we have the ability to think about the beliefs of the others and ourselves. Mere cow-reactions can be regularly observed, but this cannot explain the *emergence* of norms. The norms are already there when we can observe something as regularity. In order to reach for *conditions* for normativity, we must go beyond the observations of regularity. Regularity of behavior in speechless creatures does fulfill two out of the three conditions that Davidson has pointed out for development of thought and language. The dispositions to categorize in certain ways, which are common for a species, are the first condition that is fulfilled. Next, there must be a statistically based normality present. This condition is fulfilled when we can observe regularity. The third condition is the possibility of error and an awareness of the possibility of error. If the creature in question produces a cow-reaction when no cow is present, we would normally ascribe an error to the creature, and we would perhaps say that his utterance were false. But as long as the creature is unaware of the possibility that something he utters can be a mistake, there is no way for us, as interpreters to actually operate with a notion of error, mistake or falsity, on a methodologically sound basis. We really would have no idea of why the creature uttered a cow-reaction when no cow was present.

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