

DAVIDSON, ANALYTICITY, AND THEORY CONFIRMATION

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### ABSTRACT

Few 20<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers have investigated the relations among language, thought, and reality as deeply as Donald Davidson has. In this dissertation I explore the work of Donald Davidson, reveal an inconsistency in it, and resolve that inconsistency in a way that complements a debate in the philosophy of science. I start by explicating Davidson's extensional account of meaning, presenting his seemingly disparate views as a coherent whole. Then I explicate Davidson's views on the dualism between conceptual schemes and empirical content, isolating four seemingly different arguments that Davidson makes against the dualism; I demonstrate that though the arguments fail each is ultimately meant to rely on his account of meaning.

Next I show that Davidson's extensional account of meaning entails the analytic-synthetic distinction while *also* needing to reject it. I then propose a resolution to Davidson's dilemma. Rather than treating the interpretation of meaning as continuous with the holistic enterprise of science, as Quine treats translation, we should treat it as conceptually prior to science, as Kant treats epistemology. Nonetheless I recognize four reasons why Davidson himself would reject doing so. I therefore propose a view called 'transcendental semantics', based on Davidson's, but incorporating my resolution. Further, transcendental semantics, like Kant's transcendental idealism, posits a single

conceptual scheme (though Kant's is concerned with Newtonian physics; transcendental semantics, interpretation).

Finally, I show how positing such a scheme bolsters a promising neo-Carnapian account of theory confirmation proposed by Michael Friedman. Those who confirm theories, in science or otherwise, are first and foremost interpreters—a fact whose import emerges as anything but pedestrian during revolutions in thought.

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