Review

Reviewed Work(s): Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective by Donald Davidson
Review by: David L. Hildebrand
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of fundamental issues and have taken their characteristic approaches to them. They thus could learn from each other and jointly contribute to the common philosophical enterprise through constructive dialogue and engagement. This reference book has made its significant contribution to such constructive dialogue and engagement. To this extent, this is truly an encyclopedia of Chinese *philosophy* with its global character in view of world philosophy.—Bo Mou, *San Jose State University.*

DAVIDSON, Donald. *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. xviii + 237 pp. Paper, $19.95—In Vermeer's painting *The Lacemaker* an artisan works with loving intensity, employing a sensibility at once intimate and strategically detached. Davidson's careful prose embodies both the logic and beauty of lace as it simply and plainly leads one into the intricate connections among thought, language, and sociality. While the subject matters are analytic and serious, Davidson imbues them with a dry sense of humor and sparkles of warmth. Of course *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (*SIO*) is an important collection of philosophical work; it also happens to be a pleasure to read.

This collection of Davidson's essays is the third in a (roughly chronological) five-volume series; volumes four and five have yet to be released as of this writing. *SIO* spans the period from 1982 to 1998 but centers upon Davidson's work in the 1980s. The essays are organized into three sections which describe three kinds of knowledge and their interrelationships. Davidson's helpful introduction summarizes the main point of each chapter and the book's overarching vision; there is a bibliography and an index.

Three philosophical problems motivate *SIO*: "how a mind can know the world of nature, how it is possible for one mind to know another, and how it is possible to know the contents of our own minds without resort to observation or evidence" (p. 208). Addressing these questions are the main arguments of the volume: that first person authority and externalism are compatible; that sociality is an inexpungible ingredient in the very existence of thought, language, and selfhood; and that objective knowledge may be defended against skepticism without relying upon traditional coherence or correspondence theories. All these positions spring from this central epistemological starting point:

"I, like every other rational creature, have three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the objective world . . . ; knowledge of the minds of others . . . ; and knowledge of the contents of my own mind. None of these three sorts of knowledge is reducible to either of the other two, or to any other two in combination . . . [and] none is conceptually or temporally prior to the others" (p. 87).

Pivotal to this tripartite division of knowledge, as well as to Davidson's accounts of selfhood, thought, and interpretation, is a notion he names "triangulation":

"The possibility of thought as well as of communication depends, in my view, on the fact that two or more creatures are responding, more or less simultaneously, to input from a shared world, and from each other. . . . [T]his triangular nexus of causal relations . . . supplies the conditions necessary for the concept of truth to have application" (p. 83).

"Triangulation" and other important notions such as the "principle of charity" and "radical interpretation" repeat motifically in this collection. One might anticipate such repetition in a collection of essays originally published as individual pieces; nevertheless, such repetitions prove helpful for the reader who desires a steady and cumulative appreciation of Davidson's overall view. In the remainder of this comment, I will convey the significant issues at stake in each of the three sections.

Part 1, "Subjective," contains six chapters: "First Person Authority," "Knowing One's Own Mind," "The Myth of the Subjective," "What is Present to the Mind," "Indeterminism and Antirealism," and "The Irreducibility of the Concept of the Self." It defends the epistemological presumption, privilege, and privacy of first person authority while denying that self-knowledge is infallible or solipsistically removed from others and the world. Quite the contrary:

"Thoughts are private, in the obvious but important sense in which property can be private, that is, belong to one person. And knowledge of thoughts is asymmetrical, in that the person who has a thought generally knows he has it in a way in which others cannot. But this is all there is to the subjective. . . . [T]hought is necessarily part of a common public world" (p. 52).

While thoughts are specially known to us, they may also be attributed to external factors because, Davidson argues, "for compelling *psychological* and *epistemological* reasons we should deny that there are objects of [or before] the mind" (p. 36). Sensation's role in connecting beliefs with the world, while causal, is not, Davidson argues, epistemological. The "third dogma" of traditional empiricism should be abandoned: "[E]mpiricism is the view that the subjective ('experience') is the foundation of objective empirical knowledge. I am suggesting that empirical knowledge has no epistemological foundation, and needs none" (p. 46). Davidson analyzes what is present to the mind (that is, "propositions" not "objects") and then explains why our necessarily indeterminate translations of those propositions should not hoodwink us into accepting antirealism about mental states. Here, as well as in the final essay of part 1, Davidson emphasizes how deeply interconnected subjectivity and intersubjectivity are. While, for example, each person depends upon personalized standards of rationality, those standards are objective (not subjective or arbitrary) due to the "triangular nexus of causal relations" mentioned earlier: "[T]he ultimate source (not ground) of objectivity is . . . intersubjectivity" (p. 83). This nexus also conditions the self, which is both irreducible and distinct from that which sustains it—other people and a common world.

Part 2, "Intersubjective," is the shortest section and contains three pieces: "Rational Animals," "The Second Person," and "The Emergence of Thought." The first holds potentially broad interest as it spells out

Davidson's method for assessing rationality. To find out if something is rational, we must determine if it can have propositional attitudes. Since such attitudes depend on the having of concepts—an essentially linguistic process taking place within the "triangular nexus"—many creatures that interact in complex ways with the world are, nevertheless, not rational. (It should be noted that Davidson takes care to deny that this should allow cavalier or insensitive treatment of these creatures.) In the subsequent essay, Davidson argues that understanding a language is essentially an attempt to understand the behavior of other speakers. *Contra* Kripke he suggests that we "ought to question the appropriateness of the ordinary concept of following a rule": "There is . . . no inner mental act or process of 'grasping' or of 'following' the rule, so no study or knowledge of what is inside the speaker will reveal whether she is following one set of rules or another" (p. 113). Intentions—not rules—are paramount to explaining linguistic action. Since a communicative intention entails an interlocutor, other persons are indispensable. One's first language cannot be private because "language is necessarily a social affair" (p. 117). In perhaps the most ambitious piece of part 2, Davidson attempts to describe how thought emerges from nonthought—no small chore since the complex interdependence of mentality's aspects (the "holism of the mental") makes analysis difficult. Davidson's suggestion (which bears a significant resemblance to one advanced in John Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*) suggests that "a prelinguistic, precognitive situation . . . constitute[s] a necessary condition for thought and language, a condition that can exist independent of thought, and can therefore precede it" (p. 128). This "situation," familiarly, "involves two or more creatures simultaneously in interaction with each other and with the world they share; it is what I call *triangulation*" (p. 128). The language forged through triangulation leads eventually to thought, judgments, and the concept of objective truth.

The final section, "Objective," contains five essays: "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge/Afterthoughts," "Empirical Content," "Epistemology and Truth," "Epistemology Externalized," and "Three Varieties of Knowledge." The last chapter draws together ideas central to *SIO* and could profitably be read first, along with the introduction. In this section Davidson attacks the traditional search for some "ultimate" justificatory evidence, and he seeks to undermine two important epistemological debates: the debate between correspondence (for example, Moritz Schlick) and coherence (for example, O. H. O. Neurath) theories of truth, and the more general division over whether truth is subjective or objective. While traditional correspondence theories are, in effect, dismissed as nonsensical (because "no one has ever explained in what such a correspondence could consist . . . and . . . [the theory] is predicated on the false assumption that truth is transparently epistemic." [pp. 154–5]), traditional coherence theories require something more to make them true. We must accept, Davidson says, that while the truth of a coherent system of mutually supporting beliefs cannot be proved to the skeptic's satisfaction, we can come to understand why the skeptic's standards are unreasonable. This insight rests upon interpreters' having charity: "The principle of charity plays a crucial role . . . [and] directs the interpreter to translate or interpret so as to read some of his own

standards of truth into the pattern of sentences held true by the speaker" (p. 148). This charity is not just based on a magnanimous feeling, however, but upon the recognition that the mass of beliefs uttered are veridical because "the causal relations between our beliefs and speech, and the world also supply the interpretation of our language and of our beliefs" (p. 174). Charity is pragmatic, too, for it promotes understanding: "The point . . . is to make the speaker intelligible . . . [and] to favor interpretations that as far as possible preserve truth: I think it makes for mutual understanding, and hence for better interpretation" (pp. 148–9).

While Davidson rejects the coherence/correspondence and subjective/objective dyads, he is willing to go ahead and limn his own version of realism that insists there is "an objective world independent of our thought or language" (p. 138) but is classifiable as neither of Putnam's alternatives ("internal" or "metaphysical" realism). Justification should be quarantined at the level of sentences ("nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief"; p. 141); this will help empiricists avoid the skeptical pitfalls that arise when sensations are deployed to do epistemological work: "The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes . . . [rather] the relation is causal" (p. 143). Davidson credits Tarski for this sentence-level approach to truth, but he notes that greater attention must be paid to the manifold uses of sentences since use incorporates a necessary point on the triangle, the intersubjective.

Much recent debate between realists and antirealists (or "objectivists" and "relativists") has been concerned to demonstrate either the superiority of one view over the other or, more likely, the collapse of one view into the other. These articles stand together in their effort to resist either of these solutions without taking another popular tack: just dismissing these traditional philosophical problems as nonproblems. Davidson's arguments compel pluralism about the three kinds of knowledge (for example, arguments for their irreducibility and conecessity) and, because he believes a causal basis underpins the truthful interpretation of most of our beliefs, he can happily show crippling skepticisms the door. Davidson's view proposes a genuine *via media*. On the one hand, it tempers the impulse toward hardcore scientific realism: "A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things. It makes no sense to question the adequacy of this measure, or to seek a more ultimate standard" (p. 218). On the other hand, it reigns in those with heady, subjectivistic ambitions: "[T]he picture of thought I have sketched here leaves no room for [making the subjective prior to the objective] since it predicates self-knowledge on knowledge of other minds and of the world. The objective and the intersubjective are thus essential to anything we can call subjectivity, and constitute the context in which it takes form" (p. 219). Best of all, *SIO*'s predominant view leaves us with a philosophy clearly open to evolution: "What is certain is that the clarity and effectiveness of our concepts grows with the growth of our understanding of others. There are no definite limits to how far dialogue can or will take us" (p. 219).—David L. Hildebrand, *University of Colorado at Denver*.