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Intention and Judgment-Dependence:

First-Personal vs. Third-Personal Accounts

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Abstract

A Third-Person-Based or Third-Personal Judgment-Dependent account of mental content implies that, as an *a priori* matter, facts about a subject's mental content are precisely captured by the judgments of a second-person or an interpreter. Alex Byrne, Bill Child, and others have discussed attributing such a view to Donald Davidson. This account significantly departs from a First-Person-Based or First-Personal Judgment-Dependent account, such as Crispin Wright's, according to which, as an *a priori* matter, facts about intentional content are constituted by the judgments of the subject herself, formed under certain optimal or cognitively ideal conditions. I will argue for two claims: (1) Attributing a Third-Personal Judgment-Dependent account to Davidson is unjustified; Davidson's view is much closer to a non-reductionist First-Personal Judgment-Dependent account. (2) Third-Personal accounts rest on a misconstrual of the role of an interpreter in the First-Personal accounts; the notion of an interpreter still plays an essential role in the latter ones.

Keywords: Interpretivism; Interpretationism; Judgment-Dependence; Non-Reductionism; Donald Davidson; Crispin Wright.

1. Introduction

Byrne (1998) introduces a view that he calls ‘Interpretivism’, according to which ‘[a]s an a priori matter, the facts about mental content are precisely captured by the judgments of some Ideal Interpreter’ (1998, 200). Fodor and Lepore (1992) took ‘Interpretivism’ to be a weaker view implying that there is a (substantial) ‘element of interpretation in content ascription’ (1992, 138, 259). Child (1994) also introduces ‘Interpretationism’, according to which ‘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’ (1994, 1).¹ In their discussion, Child and Byrne heavily rely on Davidson’s famous claim that ‘[w]hat a fully informed interpreter could know about what a speaker means is all there is to learn; the same goes for what the speaker believes’ (Davidson 1986, 315). This can be called the ‘strong version of interpretivism’. But it would not matter, for the purpose of this paper, whether facts about mental content are taken to be wholly constituted by facts about interpretation or they are partly so. My arguments target any view that takes a second person’s judgments to be playing a substantial role in the process of determining the content of the subject’s intentional states. For this reason, I will call this sort of view the ‘Third-Person-Based or Third-Personal Judgment-Dependent’ (‘3PJD’ henceforth) account of mental content, according to which (truths about) the contents of the subject’s mental states are, at least partly, constituted or metaphysically determined by (truths about) the judgments of a second subject, or here an interpreter. Byrne and Child attribute this account to both Davidson and Dennett, while Fodor and Lepore specifically attribute it to Dennett, though they do not deny the similarity between the views of Davidson and Dennett.² This paper evaluates the attribution of a 3PJD account to Davidson. For this reason, I will not engage in a detailed discussion of each of the above philosophers’ remarks on the topic, especially Child’s, Mölder’s, and DeLancey’s book-length discussions. Rather, I will concentrate on the general form that this view may take.

I will introduce Wright's Judgment-Dependent account of intention in Section 2. The reason why I begin with Wright's account is that, for one thing, his account can be viewed as the standard version of the sort of accounts which I call 'First-Person-Based or First-Personal Judgment-Dependent' ('1PJD' henceforth) accounts, according to which truths about the content of the subject's intentional states are, at least partly, determined by the judgments of the subject herself. Since I aim to criticize 3PJD accounts by contrasting them with 1PJD accounts, an introduction of Wright's account as the standard version of the latter will help the reader to more straightforwardly engage in the topic. For another, an overview of Wright's account, which is commonly considered as a viable judgment-dependent account of meaning and intention, also helps clarify the general form of such accounts and especially what conditions they must meet if they are to successfully accomplish their main task, i.e., construing intention and meaning as judgment-dependent – as there is a consensus on the centrality of at least some of the conditions that Wright has introduced. Finally, a 3PJD account can basically be characterized by replacing the judge with the interpreter, rather than the subject herself, in Wright's account. In Section 3, I will introduce such a 3PJD account. Section 4 makes a comparison between these two accounts with the aim of showing two main things: (1) By focusing on the crucial role the notion of an interpreter plays in 1PJD accounts, I argue that 3PJD accounts rest on a misconstrual of the role of an interpreter in 1PJD accounts; (2) I will then show that it has been such a misunderstanding of 1PJD accounts that has motivated many to attribute a 3PJD account to Davidson; consequently, I will argue that attributing such an account to Davidson is mistaken and generally unmotivated.³

2. Wright's First-Personal Account

The case I focus on here is Wright's account of intention.⁴ This account, like the broader response-dependent accounts, has been designed to explain the sort of *covariance* we commonly concede there is between truths about a specific subject matter and truths about the subject's responses of a sort, here her best opinions or judgments about it. To borrow Richard Holton's terminology, take 'F' to be a predicate in our language denoting the property of being F and suppose that it is *a priori* knowable to be true – i.e., via analyzing or mere reflection on the concept alone – that an object, *x*, is F if and only if it produces a certain response, R, in proper observers under certain optimal conditions. We can present such a covariance in the form of a biconditional, which is supposed to be known to be true *a priori*:

x is F \leftrightarrow x produces response R in proper observers under certain optimal conditions.

If the responses from the subject, S, which are of interest to us, are S's opinions or judgments, we say that the following biconditional is knowable to be true *a priori* if F is a judgment-dependent concept:

x is F \leftrightarrow S judges that x is F under certain optimal conditions.

In this sense, F is a response-dependent concept, according to Holton, if it is a concept that is 'connected, in an *a priori* way, with certain human responses' (Holton 1992, 180). It is important to note that it is *part* of our definition of a response-dependent concept that the sort of biconditional mentioned above is *a priori* knowable to be true. Otherwise, whether the biconditional is true is at best knowable *a posteriori*, i.e., by appealing to experience of the external world involving something other than mere reflection on the concept itself. But, if F is supposed to be judgment-dependent, then for S to know that x is F if and only if she judges that x is so under optimal conditions must not require knowledge over and above mere reflection on the concept, F.

The first step toward establishing such an account is to specify the conditions under which S can be said to have formed her best opinion about the subject matter in question. These conditions vary, dependent on the sort of property we are concerned with: if the case is color properties – denoted, for instance, by the predicate ‘is red’ – the conditions would concern the proper functioning of S’s visual apparatus, the lighting conditions, and similar.⁵ In the case of intention, the conditions concern S’s conceptual capacity. Wright specifies such ‘cognitively ideal conditions’, or simply the ‘C-conditions’,⁶ as follows: S has the appropriate concepts required to form the relevant judgments, such as that of intention, lacks self-deception, and is appropriately attentive to the question as to what her intention is.⁷ Suppose that S has formed her judgment about what she intends under such conditions. According to Wright, the relationship between truths about S’s intentions and S’s best judgments about those intentions can be captured in a biconditional, which itself lies within a conditional. He calls it the ‘provisoed biconditional’ or ‘provisional equation’ (PE):

PE: C-conditions hold \rightarrow (S intends to ϕ \leftrightarrow S judges that she intends to ϕ).⁸

The equation or the biconditional in PE is ‘provisional’ because it is itself conditional on the obtaining of the C-conditions.⁹ If the C-conditions fail to obtain, the account remains silent about the determination relation between S’s intentions and S’s relevant judgments.

What PE says is that, under C-conditions, if S judges that she has an intention, she does have it, and *vice versa*. Now there are two ways to explain this covariance: according to one, it is S’s judgments that *constitute* truths about her intentions, while according to the other, S’s judgments are at most merely good at *tracking* the (independently constituted) truths about S’s having those intentions. Thus, we need to answer the question as to whether S’s best opinions about her intention play an *extension-determining* role, in which case intention can be viewed as judgment-dependent, or they merely play an *extension-tracking* role, in which case intention

can be viewed as, at best, judgment-independent.¹⁰ In order to see what role S's opinions play, Wright introduces four conditions, which if PE satisfies, we can be assured of the fact that intention *is* treatable as judgment-dependent: (I) A Priority Condition: PE is to be *a priori* knowable to be true. S's mere reflection on, or analysis of, the concept of intention must suffice for her to know that, under C-conditions, she has an intention if and only if she judges that she has it. Otherwise, S's mere reflection on the concept of intention would not be the only ground for the truth of PE: truths about S's having an intention would be answerable to considerations besides S's own opinions about them.¹¹ (II) Substantiality or Non-Triviality Condition: The C-conditions must not contain whatever-it-takes conditions, under which it is guaranteed that S's judgments about her intention are always correct. Otherwise, we cannot decide whether it is S's own judgments only, rather than something else, that constitute facts about S's intentions.¹² (III) Independence Condition: The C-conditions are to be specified without presupposing truths about S's intending to ϕ . Since facts about what S's intention is are supposed to get determined *after* the formation of S's best judgments under C-conditions, the C-conditions must not already assume such facts.¹³ (IV) Extremal Condition: there must be no better explanation of why PE meets conditions (I)-(III) than to view truths about S's intentions as judgment-dependent.¹⁴ Otherwise, although PE may meet (I)-(III), there might still be facts other than those about S's best opinions that do constitute truths about S's intention. If any of the above conditions fails to obtain, intention cannot be viewed as judgment-dependent.

In the course of satisfying these conditions, the main trouble is to meet the Substantiality Condition because the C-conditions in the case of intention included the no-self-deception condition. As Wright puts it, 'self-deception covers ... *any* motivated condition which might lead to a subject's ignorance or error concerning his or her intentions' (2001, 201). And, as he rightly emphasizes, 'that, of course, is just the sort of insubstantial, whatever-it-takes formulation which condition (ii) was meant to exclude' (2001, 202). For Wright, this

problem can be solved if we treat conditions like the no-self-deception as *positive presumptive*: ‘one is entitled to assume that a subject is *not* materially self-deceived, or unmotivatedly similarly afflicted, unless one possesses determinate evidence to the contrary’ (2001, 202). We can assume that the no-self-deception condition has been met, unless there is evidence to the contrary. In this case, we would be able to remove it from the C-conditions and preserve their substantiality. This version of PE is ‘a restricted provisional biconditional’ (2001, 202) because PE is *a priori* reasonable to be held to be true *only if* there is no evidence to the effect that S is self-deceived. Granted that, the subject’s ‘opinions, formed under the restricted set of C-conditions, play a *defeasible* extension-determining role, with defeat conditional on the emergence of evidence that one or more of the background, positive-presumptive, conditions are not in fact met’ (2001, 203).¹⁵

Wright’s account is non-reductionist because, in PE, the concept of intention figures in both sides of the biconditional – or the predicate ‘intends to’ or the expression ‘intention’ appears on both sides of the biconditional. However, 1PJD accounts can be reductionist as well, as the following equation, ‘Reductionist Equation’ (RE), in a different 1PJD account can show it:

RE: C-conditions hold \rightarrow (S intends to do $\phi \leftrightarrow$ S judges that doing ϕ is pleasant).

In RE, ‘intends to’ does *not* appear on the right-hand side of the biconditional. An account generating RE is a reductionist 1PJD account.¹⁶ Wright’s account does not aim to reduce truths about S’s intentions to any more basic truths. The account is considered valuable because it helps tackle with at least two central philosophical problems: (1) facts about what S intends, on this account, are constituted by facts about S’s own best opinions about it. This answers the metaphysical question as to what it is to intend to ϕ : it is for S to judge, under C-conditions, that she has that intention. (2) It also explains why S can be credited with reliable, correct,

groundless, transparent, and authoritative knowledge of the content of her own intention, contrary to the way others may gain knowledge of what she intends: for S to know that she has an intention is just for her to judge, once the C-conditions obtain, that she has it. Wright also deploys this account to provide a non-reductionist response to Kripke's Wittgenstein's sceptical problem.¹⁷ Based on the general characteristics of this account, I now sketch the general form of a 3PJD account, which is often attributed to Davidson.

3. The Third-Personal Account

Davidson has famously stated that '[w]hat a fully informed interpreter could know about what a speaker means is all there is to learn; the same goes for what the speaker believes' (1986, 315). In order to clarify this claim, we can use the notion of facts about mental and semantical content.¹⁸ For Davidson, as the above passage seems to suggest, facts about what the speaker means and believes are constituted by facts about how her verbal behavior is interpreted by an 'ideal' or 'fully informed' interpreter. If so, it would arguably be the judgments of the interpreter rather than those of the subject herself that are supposed to constitute facts as to what the subject means and believes.¹⁹

The passage quoted above is the main 'textual evidence' which Byrne, Fodor and Lepore, Child and others rely on when discussing an attribution of a 3PJD account to Davidson.²⁰ What does this sort of account imply? Let us consider an example first. According to Byrne's characterization of this view, 'as an a priori matter, the facts about mental content are precisely captured by the judgments of some Ideal Interpreter' (1998, 200). The general question about any such notion in such accounts is: Who is this ideal or fully informed interpreter and what is the role of such a notion? For instance, Byrne states that a fully informed interpreter is an *idealization* of human beings who 'is capable of discovering exactly what you

believe and desire' (1998, 199). Child states that 'a fully informed interpreter, in favorable circumstances, is limited to knowledge of what a subject would do and say in various situations' (1994, 31). These attempts would not help clarify what such an idealization of human beings implies. On pain of trivializing the correctness of the interpreter's judgments – and thus violating the Substantiality Condition – it is presupposed that 'the Interpreter's stipulated initial stock of knowledge had better not include knowledge of your propositional attitudes' (Byrne 1998, 199).²¹ This is certainly true and is a condition that any judgment-dependent account must meet in general. Thus, everyone seems to agree that the A Priority and Substantiality Conditions, which Wright introduced in the previous section, must be met by 3PJD accounts too. The ideal interpreter can have no access to any detailed information about S's mental content because, otherwise, the interpreter's judgments would always be guaranteed to be correct; this would trivialize the truth of the relevant biconditional in the account. Under certain ideal conditions, as the 3PJD account goes, the interpreter would succeed to attribute to S exactly those meanings and intentions that S possesses. Therefore, under such conditions, S has an intention if and only if the interpreter judges that S has it. Such a covariance between truths about S's intending to ϕ and the judgments of some ideal interpreter in 3PJD accounts can be presented in the following third-personal biconditional or 'Third-Personal Equation' (TE):

TE: Ideal conditions obtain \rightarrow (S_1 intends to $\phi \leftrightarrow S_2$ (some interpreter) judges that S_1 intends to ϕ).

As previously mentioned, this sort of account too must respect the A Priority Condition and the Substantiality Condition because the claim was that something like TE must be *a priori* knowable to be true and that the ideal conditions must not provide the interpreter with whatever necessary to always make correct judgments about S's intentions.²²

In what follows, I argue (1) that 3PJD accounts rely on a misconstrual of the substantial role that the notion of an interpreter and that of interpretability play in 1PJD accounts (and are thus generally unmotivated) and, (2), that Davidson's view is not of a 3PJD sort, rather a 1PJD account along the lines suggested by Wright.

4. First-Personal vs. Third-Personal Accounts

One crucial difference between 3PJD and 1PJD accounts seems to be that while, in the former, the notion of an interpreter cannot be dismissed, in the 1PJD accounts, even if one superficially injects this notion into the account, it can be removed freely. For instance, Byrne states that in 1PJD accounts, 'the Interpreter is otiose: she could be eliminated if desired' (1998, 200-201). I believe this is not true. Moreover, I also believe that it is a proper 1PJD account, rather than a 3PJD account, that can and does correctly capture the role of an interpreter in Davidson's later view of meaning and intention – which a judgment-dependent account is supposed to deal with in general, i.e., an explanation of what it is that constitutes the fact that S intends something, means something, judges something, and the like. If so, the main motivation for defending a 3PJD account and attributing it to Davidson is wrong-headed. Let me explain these claims.

Surely, in 1PJD accounts, the notion of an interpreter is not supposed to play *that* specific sort of constitutive role that is taken to be played by it in a 3PJD account because, in the former, it is the judgment of the subject *herself*, rather than that of a second subject, that is supposed to determine facts about the content of the subject's intentional states. This is, I believe, the source of the misleading claim that in 1PJD accounts the notion of an interpreter can be removed, as well as the claim that Davidson thereby endorses a 3PJD account, not a 1PJD one – as the notion of an interpreter is surely central to Davidson's view. Both such

claims are mistaken, as we will see: (1) the notion of an interpreter cannot be removed in 1PJD accounts; it rather reappears as the notion of the subject remaining interpretable to an interpreter, being subject to potential interpretation, or more generally that of interpretability. I show this by briefly returning to Wright's account and explaining how this account deals with the problem of self-deception. (2) Davidson's main claim in his later view of meaning and intention has been that the subject is *free* in her practice of meaning and intending things: the only constraint Davidson imposes on such a practice is *interpretability*, in that such a practice must be interpretable to an interpreter. Appreciating this core claim is exactly what Wright's account attempts to do, overlooking which has had its roots in neglecting certain key features of Wright's and Davidson's accounts, especially the distinction between the two scenarios in Davidson's works in which the notion of an interpreter has a role to play.

First of all, consider the C-conditions in Wright's 1PJD account, which included the following condition: S must have the required concepts; here, that of intention. What does this condition imply? One cannot expect a subject to make any judgment about something of which she has no concept. This is a substantial condition that any judgment-dependent account must meet, whether First-Personal or Third-Personal: even if our concern is the judgments of an interpreter, at least the interpreter himself must have the concepts which he is supposed to deploy in his judgments. But, does it mean that the notion of an interpreter is thereby redundant in these accounts? It is not. We can see it better if we return to the no-self-deception condition in Wright's account and the way he treats it.

Wright's question was how could we claim that S is not self-deceived? If S is self-deceived, although she intends to ϕ , she may fail to judge that she intends to ϕ – similarly, if S is colorblind, we cannot rely on S's judgments about the color of an object. If we cannot deal with the problem of self-deception, we cannot view S's self-ascriptions of intention as correct, reliable, and authoritative. Wright attempts to solve this problem by treating the conditions like

the no-self-deception condition as certain positive (held-by-default) presumptions: in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we have no reliable reason to doubt the truth and reliability of S's self-ascriptions of intention. In this case, we can continue treating S's best opinions about her intentions as (defeasibly) extension-determining. For, 'when possession of a certain intention is an aspect of a self-conception that coheres well enough both internally and with the subject's behaviour, there is nothing else that makes it true that the intention is indeed possessed' (Wright 2001, 204). According to Wright, in order to see if the no-self-deception condition is met, we need to be sure of the obtaining of the fact that S's self-ascriptions are compatible with her self-ascriptions of other intentional states and with her outward performance. This is what we can call Wright's 'Interpretationist Constraint' on his 1PJD account of intention.²³ This constraint has the following significant claim in itself: if S is alone, then, as Wittgenstein has highlighted it, whatever seems right to S is right and consequently, the self-ascriptions of intentions, which S takes to cohere well with her behavior and with her self-ascriptions of other attitudes, must be taken to be so compatible.²⁴

Without this constraint in play, there would be no genuine ground on which S's self-ascriptions can be measured as true or false, right or wrong, reliable or unreliable: no correctness conditions for S's application of the predicate under consideration can be given, the predicate which supposedly denotes a certain property. What we need at this point to fill the gap – *if S is assumed to already possess the required concepts* – is nothing but *interpretability*, and this provides us with the sort of publicly available evidence that we desperately needed for creating the possibility of a potential assessment of S's self-ascriptions, i.e., whether they are compatible with S's behavior and S's self-ascriptions of other intentional states, or whether S is self-deceived or, for that matter, wrong, ignorant or mistaken about them. Wright puts this Interpretationist Constraint as 'the constraint of having to have one's sincere self-ascriptions make sense in the light of one's outward performance' (2001, 87). The

Interpretationist Constraint can be viewed as an interpretationist reading of the no-self-deception condition, in which the interpreter has an *essential* role to play: in the absence of this constraint, the positive presumptive claims cannot function. This situation, in which interpretability would suffice to supply our desired public criteria, is distinct from the situation in which our concern is to specify the necessary conditions for the *emergence* of thought and language, in which *actual interpretation* is required. The latter appears in Davidson's discussion of the notion of triangulation, while the former is Davidson's chief concern in his discussion of success in the practice of speaking and understanding the speech of others, what they mean, believe, intend, desire, etc., which has this positive assumption in the background that the subjects are already rational. This distinction has been overlooked by many in their attribution of a 3PJD account to Davidson. All these have been properly implemented in Wright's C-conditions: Wright's 1PJD account is best fitted with Davidson's account, once we carefully distinguish between the two scenarios in which Davidson thinks the notion of an interpreter has a role to play.

The claim that in 1PJD accounts, the interpreter can be eliminated if desired was mistaken because we saw that this notion played a substantial role in these accounts. In fact, I think the role that this notion plays in 1PJD accounts captures precisely the sort of role Davidson has had in mind in his extensive deployment of the notion of *interpretability*, rather than that of actual interpretation. Let me put these in the following two claims: (1) although in both of the aforementioned scenarios in Davidson's works, i.e. the *process of concept-acquiring* or concept-emergence and the *practice of successfully meaning and intending something*, the notion of an interpreter plays a role, it is the role that it plays in Davidson's remarks on the latter that is and is to be the target of a proper judgment-dependent account in general, and this role can be best captured in a 1PJD account along the lines suggested by Wright. (2) The reason behind this is that Davidson's remarks on the notion of actual

interpretation concern the process in which a languageless creature becomes a linguistic and rational one, but judgment-dependent accounts have nothing to do with such a process at all; thus, attributing a 3PJD account to Davidson on the basis of such remarks is implausible. In other words, when building a judgment-dependent account, it does not matter *how* the subject has acquired the concepts that the account expects her to possess. The detail of the process through which a creature becomes a rational agent with a rich set of interrelated concepts and propositional attitudes is beside the point of such accounts. For, the accounts' job is to explain a certain already conceded covariance between S's having a particular intention and S's judgments about it. The account, in other words, *begins* with the assumption that S already has such attitudes, is capable of making judgments, and even expressing them in her language. To call a creature a 'subject' or a 'rational agent' is to treat it as a creature which *itself* has a rich set of interrelated concepts, so that, as Wright puts it, 'wholesale suspicion about my attitudinal avowals ... jars with conceiving of me as an intentional subject at all' (2001, 325). What does Davidson say about the process through which a creature ends up with certain concepts, thoughts, and a language?

Davidson's remarks on *actual interpretation* in his discussion of the notion of triangulation – which have motivated many to attribute a 3PJD account to him – concern the process of concept-acquiring, learning a first-language, or becoming a rational agent. But Davidson never took actual interpretation to be necessary for S to form a *particular* intention or mean a specific thing by her utterance: actual interpretation and potential interpretability belong to two different projects. What Davidson has been concerned with, in his discussion of success in communication and interpretation, in his remarks on S's intending to do something, S's speaking in the right way, and so forth, is *interpretability*, not actual interpretation: if S is a speaker, it would be enough for her to mean something specific by her utterance *if* she intends her utterance to be interpreted in a certain way *and* it is potentially so interpretable. Wright's

1PJD account relied on this very notion. Here the point is that Davidson's discussion of the notion of triangulation, which rests on the notion of actual interpretation or actual linguistic interaction between the creature and a second creature sufficiently like the first, offers a story about the foundation of conceptualization, that is, (hopefully) a story about the necessary and sufficient conditions under which a creature can be said to have come up with thoughts and language. These remarks are significant but *irrelevant* to the issues about what our judgment-dependent account has been designed to explain, i.e., *the already conceded covariance between facts about S's intentions and S's judgments about them*. Davidson's point in talking about actual interpretation and triangulation has been that if there is no other creature around, which can linguistically communicate with the first creature, it can never be said to *possess* the concept of truth or objectivity and thus *any* concept at all: such an interaction is a necessary condition on the creature's success in becoming a rational one and possessing a rich enough set of concepts.

More particularly, in his discussion of the notion of triangulation, Davidson claims that determining the actual, external cause of S's responses requires S to possess the concept of truth, i.e., to command the Wittgensteinian *seems right/is right* distinction, or as he adds, 'appreciating the contrast between true belief and false, between appearance and reality, mere seeming and being' (Davidson 1991, 156).²⁵ According to Davidson, acquiring and applying this concept – without which no other concept can be acquired at all – needs the presence of a second subject like S. He primarily considers the case of 'primitive' or 'prelinguistic' triangulation, in which S responds to a specific stimulus and simultaneously to a second subject's similar responses to that stimulus. In this situation, their responses to the stimulus have been correlated. When this correlation breaks, they notice the difference or dissimilarity in the responses; such a situation gives rise to the opportunity, for each subject, to make sense of the difference between what seems to be the case to each and what is the case independently

of how things appear to each. Davidson, however, thinks that this prelinguistic triangulation emerges in the case of animals with no language too. Thus, although it is necessary, it would not be sufficient for the creatures to be said to have come up with thoughts and utterances with a determinate content.²⁶ Davidson's claim is that it is only when triangulation becomes linguistic, or when we are in 'linguistic communication' (1982, 327), that the problems with cause-determination can be solved and concepts can thereby *emerge*. As he says,

the only way of knowing that the second apex of the triangle – the second creature or person – is reacting to the same object as oneself is to know that the other person has the same object in mind. ... For two people to know [this] of each other ... requires that they be in communication. Each of them must speak to the other and be understood by the other ... they must each be an interpreter of the other. (1992, 264)

We do not need to go through Davidson's detailed discussion of the notion of triangulation any further.²⁷ The important point here is the crucial distinction he draws between mere dispositions to respond in a certain way to certain things and *judging* that a way of responding is correct. Parrots can be trained to discriminate between things and respond to them in certain ways. But, for Davidson, viewing such responses as 'correct' and 'meaningful' is entirely misleading: 'You can deceive yourself into thinking that the child is talking if it makes sounds which, if made by a genuine language user, would have a definite meaning' (1999, 11). He later clarifies this point by stating that '[w]hat is clear is that we can say the child thinks something is red ... *only if* it appreciates the distinction between the judgment and the truth for itself' (2000, 72). In order for a creature to become capable of making judgments about something's being such and such, it needs to acquire a rich set of concepts and propositional attitudes, among which the concept of truth is eminent: 'Being able to discriminate cats is not the same thing as having the concept of a cat. You have the concept of a cat only if you can make sense of the idea of *misapplying* the concept, of believing or judging that something is a cat which is not a cat'

(Davidson 1999, 8). Without *actual interpretation* at certain (early) stages of learning a first-language, there would be no possibility for the *emergence* of any concept for the creature. This means that any creature, which is capable of making such judgments, is *assumed* to be already equipped with the concepts. Wright's 1PJD account worked with the subject's *judgments* and assumed that S possesses the concepts deployed in them. Davidson's concentration, when it comes to the issue with success in the practice of meaning or intending sometime, has been on how a *speaker* or a subject can speak in an interpretable way – which again already *assumed* the speaker's possession of those concepts. If such a story about concept-acquiring, language-acquisition, rule-following and so forth, has been the main reason for attributing a 3PJD account to Davidson, it has been mistaken and based on a misconstrual of Davidson's and Wright's views of mental content and interpretation.

All these conditions, which have been Davidson's main concern, as previously indicated, have been nicely accommodated in the C-conditions in Wright's account. For one thing, the C-conditions had it that S must possess the concept of a certain thing if she is to be able to make any judgment about that thing at all, such as the concept of redness, squareness, intention, and so forth. This is to bypass all such stories about concept-emergence and instead directly deal with the issue about what constitutes facts about S's intending to do this or that or meaning this rather than that by an utterance. Some philosophers, perhaps like Dennett, does *not* aim to make such a Davidsonian claim, i.e., that the intentional system must *itself* possess the concepts: for them, it would be enough that the system's behavior can be so interpreted by us, *as if* it is a rational agent, so that *we* can usefully predict its future behavior. This is a view that Davidson strongly rejects. While a 3PJD account may capture the essence of such views, a 3PJD account cannot be attributed to Davidson.

A 1PJD account like Wright's also respects Davidson's core idea about interpretability. Recall Wright's Interpretationist Constraint on his 1PJD account:

The proposal reinstates both a standard of correctness for my opinions about what I mean [and intend] and the authority of those opinions – but in order for it to do so, I need to be considered as an at least potential object of *interpretation*, with my claims about my own meanings [and intentions] essentially defeasible in the light of the shape assumed by my actual practice. (2001, 87)

Wright's Constraint was designed to help the account avoid a violation of the Substantiality Condition. As he emphasized, what we need is only that S remains *interpretable* or a *potential* object of interpretation. This Constraint already captures what seems to be the main motivation for attributing a 3PJD account to Davidson. What is overlooked is the aforementioned Davidsonian distinction between the two stages at which an interpreter has a role to play. Davidson did not even think that we really need an *ideal* interpreter to be present – or to be theoretically necessary – in his discussion of triangulation. What was needed was the presence of another person sufficiently similar to the subject in the way they group things in the world together. As he says,

it is clear that the innate similarity responses of child and teacher – what they naturally group together – must be much alike; otherwise the child will respond to what the teacher takes to be similar stimuli in ways the teacher does not find similar. A condition for being a speaker is that there must be others enough like oneself. (1992, 264)

Nonetheless, again, in talking about what it is that constitutes the fact that a subject means this rather than that by her utterance or intends this rather than that, neither Davidson nor an advocate of a 1PJD account has ever been concerned with the process in which concepts and thoughts emerge and consequently with the notion of actual interpretation. The aim of a judgment-dependent account is to explain the relationship between S's judgments about her intentions and truths about S's having those intentions. Although Davidson has a story to tell about the necessary conditions on the process of concept-emergence, once the subject, *in*

whatever way, learns her first-language and acquires the required concepts, she *does not need to be actually (and repeatedly) interpreted* each time that she makes an utterance or intends something in order to successfully mean and intend something specific. This is the crucial difference between *being subject to interpretability* and *being subject to actual interpretation*. Wright's Interpretationist Constraint concerned interpretability and this is all that a judgment-dependent account needs to work with. Of course, if there is evidence to the contrary, such a *held-by-default* condition fails to be satisfied. But, as Davidson famously puts it, the speaker is free to use her words in whatever way she may, *provided that* her utterance is interpretable: 'Speaking a language ... merely requires that each speaker intentionally make himself *interpretable* to the other' (1992, 260, emphasis added). For, 'the best the speaker can do is to be *interpretable*' (Davidson 1984, 111). Later in his writings, Davidson states that 'what a speaker and the speaker's interpreter must share is an understanding of what the speaker means by what he says' (1991, 157). What Davidson emphasizes is that the speaker and the interpreter must share an understanding of *what the speaker means by her utterance*. This is possible only if the speaker *means* something by her utterance at all, which can then be the potential object of interpretation. In other words, for both Wright and Davidson, facts as to what S means by her utterance are constituted by S's own judgments about what it means, with the Interpretationist Constraint in the background: that such an utterance must be interpretable.

Therefore, all that Davidson's account of meaning and intention works with has been properly accommodated in Wright's 1PJD account but surprisingly missed in the 3PJD account that has often been attributed to Davidson, especially the requirement that the subject *herself* must possess the concepts and *judge* if something falls under the extension of this or that concept. But we could also see that in such a 1PJD account the role of an interpreter cannot be removed: the notion of an interpreter plays an essential role in such accounts and the role that it plays is entirely compatible with Davidson's remarks on this notion. The account fails

without the notion of interpretability in play, which is vastly deployed for the purpose of detecting the cases of self-deception, going on wrong in making a meaningful talk, and similar. A careful investigation of the main features of 1PJD accounts, such as Wright's, reveals the difficulty of seeing what a 3PJD account, if plausible at all, can offer that has not already been present in a proper 1PJD account. It is true that the 3PJD accounts might help represent the views which treat the subject *herself* as not required to possess the concepts and make the relevant judgments. Davidson's view, which asked the subject herself to possess the concepts, is not of that sort. For Davidson, it is not enough that S's behavior simply allows for treating her *as if* she is a rational agent: the subject must *be* a rational agent. Wright's 1PJD account treats the subject in the same way, i.e., as a genuine possessor of the concepts. Given that, suppose that we have attributed an account similar to Wright's to Davidson. Such an account would respect the essence of Davidson's remarks on interpretation and the individualistic, or better *interpersonal*, feature of his view of meaning and intention, i.e., the claim that what S intends or what she means by her utterance is determined by her best opinion about having those meanings or intentions so that she can be viewed as *free* to intend her utterance to mean whatever she wants. The key point is that the freedom that Davidson credits S with has already been restricted by his interpretationist (or interpretability) constraint. As he says, 'meaning something requires that by and large one follows a practice of one's own, a practice that can be understood by others' (Davidson 1994, 16).²⁸

In a similar vein, Wright also emphasized that S's self-ascriptions of meaning and intention must cohere well with her self-ascriptions of other attitudes, as well as her outward performance, so that if S's utterances are not interpretable in that way, we can justifiably doubt if she meant or intended anything. This condition, in Wright's account, was accommodated by the no-self-deception and other similar conditions in the C-conditions viewed as positive presumptive, as held by default – on pain of violating the Substantiality Condition. *If* S's self-

ascriptions of meaning and intention are interpretable, what S means and intends would depend on *S's own judgments* about them: the interpreter's job would at most be to keep track of such independently constituted facts (i.e., the facts constituted independently of the interpreter's judgments).²⁹

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that Davidson's account of meaning and intention is a 1PJD account, not a 3PJD one, mainly because (1) Davidson insists that the subject herself must possess a rich set of concepts and herself *judge* about those concepts' being applicable correctly to different things and (2) he also emphasizes that the whole account is restricted by the Interpretationist or Interpretability condition to the effect that although the speaker is free to mean and intend whatever she may, her success in meaning and intending certain things can be defeated by her failure to remain interpretable. Wright's account has been designed to accommodate exactly these features.

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¹ For Mölder (2010), as another example, interpretivism is the view that “having mental properties is a matter of interpretation” (2010, 1). There are others who have discussed this view when applied to different areas of discourse, such as DeLancey’s (2004) book-length discussion of the application of interpretationism (as an irrealist theory of mind) to the case of emotions, Curry’s (2020) discussion of the relationship between interpretivism and normativity, and Kriegel’s (2011) discussion of a Dennettian view of intentionality and justification in the attributions of intentional states. Each reads this view in their own way. My worry here is broader, as we will see.

² See Fodor and Lepore (1992, 142-144), though I do not agree that there is any serious, deep similarity between the views of Davidson and Dennett. I believe Dennett’s view may well be captured in a 3PJD account, while Davidson’s view is indeed first-personal.

³ It is worth noting that Byrne (1998) criticizes the attribution of this view to Davidson, but for reasons entirely different from mine. As the purpose of this paper is not to defend or reject Byrne’s view, I will not engage in a detailed discussion of Byrne’s criticisms, by some of which I am sympathetic and by some I am not. The same is true in the case of Child’s and Mölder’s attributions of this account to Davidson.

⁴ Though it can be applied to a variety of things, including perceptible properties and other mental states, such as that of color, shape, moral values, meaning, and so forth. See, e.g., Wright (2001, 191-199), (1992, 108-109), and (1988). Although Wright’s account is an account of intention, he also talks about the concept of intention, the predicate “intends”, and the extension of the truth predicate among (self-)ascriptions of intention. That is, if intention is judgment-dependent, it is then the subject’s judgments that fix the truth-value of self-ascriptions of intention, the correct application of the concept of intention, the extension of the predicate “... intends ...”, and similar. For instance, secondary qualities, as Wright states, “have the feature that the extensions of their signature concepts are determined ..., in the case of judgment-dependence, by the very (suitably constrained) judgments of ours about what the concepts in question apply to” (2012, 405). See also Wright (2001, 203) and (1992, 122).

⁵ See, e.g., Wright (1988) and (2001, 191-199).

⁶ See Wright (1992, 108-109) and (2001, 192-194, 197-198).

⁷ See, e.g., Wright (2001, 201).

⁸ See, e.g., Wright (1992, 119) and (2001, 202).

⁹ Cf. Johnston’s (1989, 140, 145) “Basic Equation” in which the C-conditions appear within the biconditional. Such equations would have the following form: “ x is F \leftrightarrow S judges that x is F, under optimal conditions”. Wright thinks that such a characterization of response-dependent concepts causes serious problems, among which is the problem that the obtaining of C-conditions may affect or alter the truth-value of the whole biconditional. On this, see Wright (2001, 193, fn. 33) and (1992, 117-120, 232).

¹⁰ See Wright (2001, 192).

¹¹ See Wright (1992, 116-117) and (2001, 193-194).

¹² See Wright (1992, 112) and (2001, 194).

¹³ See Wright (1992, 122-123) and (2001, 195).

¹⁴ See Wright (1992, 123-124) and (2001, 205).

¹⁵ See Hossein Khani (2023a) for a recent discussion of Wright’s way of dealing with the case of self-deception.

¹⁶ Different versions of 1PJD accounts have been defended by Johnston (1989, 1992, 1993), Pettit (1991, 1998), Powell (1998), Railton (1998) and, as we saw, especially by Wright (1988, 1992, 2001).

¹⁷ See Wright (2001, Chapter 7).

¹⁸ I have called them “fine-grained facts” elsewhere in order to keep them distinct from the Quinean facts about stimulus meaning. But, as here Quine’s view is not involved, I just use “facts” instead, by which I mean facts about the *uniquely determinate* meanings that utterances are commonly taken (by factualists) to have, or facts as to what specific things a speaker means by her words. See Hossein Khani (2023b), (2021a), and (2018a).

¹⁹ What about Dennett? Dennett’s famous “intentional stance” seems to suggest a more or less similar view. As Dennett says, “*all there is* to being a true believer is being a system whose behavior is reliably predictable via the intentional strategy, and hence *all there is* to really and truly believing that *p* ... is being an intentional system for which *p* occurs as a belief in the best (most predictive) interpretation” (1979, 29). This is to suggest that facts about a system’s having an intention is constituted by facts about *our* judgments about it having it, i.e., by an interpreter in the process of producing an intentional-stance interpretation of the system’s behavior. I think, however, that Davidson’s view is substantially different from Dennett’s, as we will see.

²⁰ See Byrne (1998, 202-203) and Child (1994, 1-7, 24, and Chapter 1). See also Fodor and Lepore (1992, 137-139).

²¹ See also Child (1994, 31).

²² An important question is what are such ideal conditions, under which the interpreter’s judgments metaphysically determine truths about S’s mental content and under which the interpreter can be viewed as an *ideal* or *fully informed* one? I will not engage in such a discussion in this paper, though I believe that 3PJD accounts would face serious problems with regard to a proper specification of such conditions, i.e., to specify these conditions in such a way that the Substantiality and A Priority Conditions can be preserved.

²³ For a discussion of this constraint, see Hossein Khani (2023a), (2022), and (2021b).

²⁴ See, e.g., Wittgenstein (1953, §§201-202); see also Kripke (1982, Chapter 2).

²⁵ For a recent discussion of Davidson’s reading of this Wittgensteinian claim, see Hossein Khani (2020).

²⁶ See, e.g., Davidson (1999, 12).

²⁷ For Davidson’s discussion of Triangulation, see Davidson (1992), (1994), (1999), and (2001). For more discussion, see Glüer (2006) and (2011, Section 5.3), Hossein Khani (2020), (2019) and (2018b), Ludwig and Lepore (2005, Section 22), Verheggen and Myers (2016).

²⁸ Also, Davidson states that “[a] speaker who wishes to be understood must intend his words to be interpreted (and hence *interpretable*) ... a hearer who wishes to understand a speaker must intend to interpret the speaker’s words as the speaker intended (whether or not the interpretation is ‘standard’)” (1987, 457, fn. 18, emphasis added). Here Davidson emphasizes that the hearer’s job is to attempt to interpret the speaker’s words as the speaker *herself* intended. Also, in “Intending”, he says that pure or actionless “intention simply is an all-out judgment” (1978, 56). These help to more clearly see how Davidson’s and Wright’s views are close to one another.

²⁹ It is not to say that 1PJD accounts, such as Wright’s, are free from any problems. For some of these problems see Boghossian (2012, 1989), Hossein Khani (2023a) and (2021b), Johnston (1993), and Miller (1989, 2007).