Kathrin Glüer, *Donald Davidson: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 313 pp., £16.99 (paperback), ISBN-13: 978-0-19-538297-6.

Donald Davidson's philosophical project – on the nature of meaning and action, the relation of the mind to the world, and of the mental to the physical – changed the face of philosophy. His work, notoriously difficult, appeared primarily in the essay form, in over 80 interconnected, elegant but compressed articles, over a period of more than 40 years, from 1963 with the publication of "Actions, Reasons and Causes," when Davidson burst onto the philosophical scene, to the posthumous publication of the Dewey lectures and the Hermes lectures in *Truth and Predication* (Davidson 2005), two years after his untimely and unexpected death in 2003. Davidson himself never wrote a canonical account of his work. The reader coming to Davidson's work for the first time faces an enormous task in coming to grips with it. In Kathrin Glüer's *Donald Davidson: A Short Introduction*, we now happily have a new, superb synoptic overview of Davidson's work across all the major areas to which he contributed, which provides the kind of guidance needed to confront the essays themselves. The book is divided into six chapters: an introduction, a chapter on "Radical Interpretation," a chapter on "The Principle of Charity," on "Davidson's Theory of Action," on Davidson's account of the relations between "Language, Mind, and World," and his account of the relation between "The Mental and the Physical." Admirably clear, it demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Davidson's work across its whole space and the intricate connections between its parts, draws connections with the history of discussions of its topics and contemporary discussion of them, and identifies tensions and questions that arise about his project. It focuses on the main lines of Davidson's work, on its unity and systematic nature. It is now the best single introduction to the whole of Davidson's philosophy that is available.

Glüer puts Davidson's account of radical interpretation – interpretation of another on the basis of evidence that does not presuppose knowledge of either the detailed contents of the other's attitudes or the meanings of any of her words – at the center of his philosophical project. As Glüer aptly puts it, "the interpreter . . . is the hero, or main character of Davidson's philosophy" (p. 4). The radical interpreter is the organizing principle for the book, and a "guide through a vast theoretical edifice, one of the last grand systems to be constructed in philosophy" (p. 280). Glüer puts it this way in the introduction:

> There is a key to the Davidsonian structure, and this key is held by its main character, the interpreter. Once his central role is recognized, most other things rather easily fall into place. Form this perspective, it is the theory of meaning and content that is at the very center of Davidson's philosophy. (p. 7)

This, I believe, is exactly right. It is from the standpoint of the interpreter, restricted to her most fundamental evidence, that we are to investigate the

concepts of thought and meaning, which organize behavior into intelligible patterns. The starting point is not arbitrary, but dictated by the nature of the subject matter, for language is a device for communication, and meaning is what it conveys, so meaning, and the thoughts connected with it, must by their nature be available in principle to others, which requires that meaning and thought be recoverable from behavioral evidence. Meaning is, as Glüer puts it, "an evidence-constituted property" (p. 8). Thus, for Davidson, meaning and thought are essentially public, and this means that while we can make sense of error and difference, this is possible only against a background of truth and of agreement, ruling out at one and the same time the possibility of massive error in our beliefs about the world and the possibility of radically different conceptual schemes. It is the radical interpreter that gives unity to Davidson's thought. It is through the lens of interpretation that we are to see what is distinctive about the rational animal, and how thought and meaning are grounded in the natural world without being reducible to it, and how we are thereby fitted out to understand the world in which we find ourselves.

In the following, I can touch on only some of the many topics that the book takes up. I will focus on a few where I have a different picture of some details.

Chapter 2 begins with a characterization of Davidson's most basic assumption about meaning, namely, that the concept gets its content from the context of communication. This motivates the adoption of the interpreter's standpoint, for if meaning is the coin of communication, it must be recoverable from what is available to an interpreter. In "Radical Interpretation," Davidson posed two questions: what could we know that would enable us to interpret another, and how could we come to know it. The first is a question about what body of knowledge about another's language could suffice in principle to interpret it. The second is about how it relates to the evidence that would confirm it for the speaker. The body of knowledge would be a theory of meaning for the speaker's language, which tells us what any of the speaker's utterances in his language mean.

Davidson envisioned a formal theory with axioms for semantically primitive expressions that enabled us to say for any sentence built up out of them what an utterance of it meant. Glüer calls such a theory a formal semantic theory, characterized as "assigning semantic values to expressions of given languages" (p. 21). This is apt to give a misleading impression of how Davidson thought of it, because aside from referring terms he denies there is any utility in the theory of meaning in assigning entities to expressions at all (meanings, properties, relations, senses, propositions and so on). Of course, Glüer notes that Davidson proposes using a truth theory to do the work of a meaning theory, but she characterizes this as a theory that "assigns *truth conditions* to the sentences of the language," but Davidson did not reify truth conditions. There are no terms for referring to things called 'truth conditions' in a truth theory, and none are needed to explain how

Davidson hoped to exploit it to do the work of a compositional meaning theory. Glüer notes this later in the chapter (p. 36).

    How is a truth theory supposed to do the job? What do we mean here by a truth theory? The sort of theory Davidson had in mind was an axiomatic theory that assigned truth or satisfaction conditions to primitive expressions, some in base clauses ('*a* est rouge' is true iff the referent of '*a*' is red) and some in recursive clauses (e.g., for any sentences S_1, S_2, S_1ˆ'et'ˆS_2 is true if S_1 is true and S_2 is true). The basic techniques were pioneered by Tarski. Tarski introduced a criterion of adequacy for a truth theory, namely, that it entail all sentences of a certain form (T),

    (T) *s* is true iff *p*

where '*p*' is replaced by a sentence that translates *s* (Tarski's Convention T). Tarski assumed translation in order to define a truth predicate. As Glüer notes, Davidson wanted to go in the other direction, to get at meaning through truth. But how exactly? Glüer says that "Davidson proposes to reformulate Convention T in terms of truth" (p. 45). What Glüer has in mind is that Davidson requires merely that a truth theory issues in sentences of the form (T) that are true; "[t]his is all that Davidson requires of a T-theory" (p. 45).

    This I think is not quite correct. When Davidson proposes to use a truth theory to pursue the aims of a compositional meaning theory in "Truth and Meaning," it is in response to the problems that he encounters in trying to develop a theory that has theorems of the form '*s* means *p*' or '*s* means that *p*' (Ludwig and Lepore 2013). He says:

> Anxiety that we are enmeshed in the intensional springs from using the words 'means that' as filling between description of sentence and sentence, but it may be that the success of our venture depends not on the filling but on what it fills. The theory will have done its work if it provides, for every sentence *s* in the language under study, a matching sentence (to replace '*p*') that, in some way yet to be made clear, 'gives the meaning' of *s*. One obvious candidate for matching sentence is just *s* itself, if the object language is contained in the metalanguage; otherwise a translation of *s* in the metalanguage. (Davidson 2001c, 23)

He then suggests treating the place of '*p*' extensionally, replacing 'means that' with a connective, and supplying a predicate for *s*. The result, as he says, is plausibly

    s is T if and only if p.

And as he notes, given the constraint on the relation between *s* and '*p*' (that '*p*' be *s* or a translation of it into the metalanguage), we have in effect required a theory that satisfies Convention T, and so determined that 'is T' has the extension of the truth predicate for the language, and so a Tarski-style truth theory that satisfies Convention T also satisfies the requirement laid down for an adequate meaning theory. The connection is made explicit when we note that if a theory satisfies Convention T, we can replace 'is T iff' with 'means that' and preserve truth. This

shows how the theory (relative to knowledge that it meets Convention T) enables us to use it for interpretation.

Davidson does not, on my reading, reformulate Convention T. Instead, he retains it as the criterion by which a truth theory is to be evaluated as adequate for use in interpretation, and he then argues for a substantive constraint on a truth theory that will enable it to satisfy Convention T (or a suitable extension to context sensitive languages – let this be understood henceforth). In "Truth and Meaning," the substantive constraint was that the theory be true. He later modified this (in "Radical Interpretation" (Davidson 2001e); see also his retrospective remarks in "Reply to Foster" (Davidson 2001f)). His later requirement was that the theory be confirmed (or confirmable) by the procedure he describes for radical interpretation (Davidson 2001e, 138–139).

Glüer goes on to raise the question of adequacy, and she notes Davidson's later requirement in "Radical Interpretation." We get a clearer view of Davidson's project, though, by seeing that the initial insight was that if you knew a Tarski-style theory for a language that you knew to satisfy Convention T, you would be in a position to interpret another's language (modulo some other bits of knowledge – see (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, ch. 9) for more details). Then the question arises how to get in a position to know such a theory, and that is by relating it to the evidence that would have to serve as the basis for its confirmation for another speaker. Davidson thought that the actual process of confirming a truth theory as such for another speaker would at the same time produce a truth theory that satisfied Convention T.

How does the radical interpreter confirm a truth theory for another's language then? Davidson assumes the interpreter can identify on a more primitive basis what he calls "hold-true attitudes", beliefs that sentences are true. How does this help? In general, a speaker holds true a sentence s because the speaker uses it to mean that p (relative to the circumstances) and believes that p. If we could figure out what the speaker believed, we could solve for meaning. This is where the Principle of Charity, in one of its aspects, comes in: if we can assume that the speaker generally gets things right, then we can look to the circumstances which prompt a speaker's hold-true attitudes. Those are prompted via the speaker being prompted to believe something about her environment. The conditions we identify as the prompting conditions are to be taken, in a first pass, as giving the content of the belief, and, hence, the content of the sentence held true, so that we can tentatively move from, e.g., 'x holds true s at time t iff p' (where 'p' expresses the prompting conditions for s to be held true) to 's is true for x at t iff p', where 'p' is taken to provide interpretive truth conditions for the sentence. This gives us target theorems for an interpretive truth theory. We develop an account, and test it. As Glüer emphasizes, we look for a best overall fit of evidence of this form with the general constraints of our theory of agents and speakers. In some cases, we

may decide, the speaker made a mistake rather than read into the content of the sentence the conditions prompting the belief on the basis of which the speaker holds it true.

The content and status of the Principle of Charity is central to Davidson's project. Glüer rightly devotes a separate chapter to it. Glüer points out that Davidson treats Charity not as a contingent principle or hopeful assumption, but constitutive of the interpreter's subject matter. There are two components to the principle, which Davidson separated in later work as the Principle of Correspondence and the Principle of Coherence. It is the former we invoked above. The latter constrains the interpreter to find his subject largely rational. Davidson treats both as constitutive of speakers. It is Correspondence that takes us from hold-true attitudes to interpretive T-sentences.

I now come to an interpretive dispute, or what appears to be an interpretive dispute, about how Davidson intended to establish that the Principle of Correspondence is constitutive of the interpreter's subject matter. If Correspondence is constitutive of the interpreter's subject matter, then any speaker is largely right about his environment, for this is what Charity requires. This means, *inter alia*, that we cannot be massively in error about the world around us, which undermines skepticism based on the assumption that it is logically possible, and that thought contents are relationally individuated, for if we alter the environment while keeping the speaker's dispositions the same, and can still fit the behavior in relation to the environment into a rational pattern, we will attribute different thought contents to the speaker – there being nothing more to being a speaker than being interpretable as one on Davidson's view. But what justifies the principle? Glüer notes that Lepore and I have argued that the "justification [of the Principle of Charity] must rest on the assumption that the radical interpreter can correctly interpret a speaker, and that charity is required for this" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, 171). Glüer responds: "As far as I can tell, this gets things backwards. Considerations of radical interpretation do not suffice to motivate charity. . . . If the purpose is nothing but making radical interpretation possible, *any* principle determining truth conditions on the basis of holding true attitudes would do." Glues says instead that "Davidson's real argument for charity comes from *the nature of belief:* According to him, belief is essentially such that it comes in true and coherent clusters" (p. 143).

I agree that, according to Davidson, belief essentially comes in true and coherent clusters. And I agree that the nature of belief is the reason that the interpreter can rely on Charity. But the question is how Davidson hoped to show that, as he put it another place, "belief is in its nature veridical" (Davidson 2001h, 146). This is certainly not something that has struck philosophers generally as obvious, and, indeed, philosophers have claimed to be able to make perfect sense of our being largely wrong about our environments and, in fact, having been

always largely wrong about them. What strategy does Davidson have for responding? Not by a direct appeal to "the nature of belief," but by an indirect argument. The indirect argument starts with the observation that our core understanding of meaning derives from its role in communication. Meaning must be retrievable therefore from the standpoint of an interpreter, and therefore must be available on the basis of public cues. To retrieve it, we need to use our evidence in order to identify meanings. Davidson describes a process that enables us to do that, provided that we can take others to be largely right about their environments. Charity is a principle that shows us how our evidence is related to what it is evidence for. Thus, to the extent to which meaning and belief are inextricable, belief must be largely veridical. Glüer objects that charity isn't needed to succeed at interpretation. Any principle will do. Is that right though? What about the principle that says that the interpreter should interpret the speaker as massively wrong about his or her environment? How does that enable the interpreter *to use her evidence* to gain access to a detailed picture of the speaker's meanings and attitudes? It is no guide whatsoever. Or suppose the principle is to assign beliefs about prime numbers on the basis of the number of words in sentences held true. Does that relate the interpreter's evidence to how she interprets the speaker? Charity gives us a principle that shows us how the evidence marshaled can be brought to bear systematically upon our interpretation of the other as a speaker and an agent. It is not clear that there is another principle that can do the same job. In any case, since it is not obvious, it is not implausible to see Davidson as using the indirect argument sketched to justify a claim about the nature of belief.

The Principle of Coherence is the other part of Charity. It has two components. One is a content principle: one can have any belief only if one has a large number of beliefs with coherently related contents. The other derives from Davidson's theory of agents as creatures capable of exhibiting largely rational patterns of activity. In this way, as Glüer points out, Davidson's theory of agency is folded into the project of radical interpretation. Glüer provides an admirable overview of Davidson's work on the theory of action in chapter 4. I select a few points to discuss in connection with it.

Davidson famously argued that action explanation is causal explanation and that reasons cause as well as minimally justify the actions for which they are reasons. The primary argument for this was that we fail to adequately capture the force of 'because' in, for example, he did it because he wanted to please his mother and he thought his going to church would please her, by appeal just to the justification for so acting reasons might provide, for one might have a reason for doing something and do it, but not for that reason. In "Actions, Reasons and Causes" (ARC), Davidson said that reasons explain actions under a description (Davidson 2001a, 5). In ARC, Davidson meant literally a definite description. This is glossed over in Glüer's discussion. Since in ARC, Davidson thought that to act

intentionally was to act with the intention of doing such and such and that this just pointed to the reasons one had and did not isolate an independent state, he also concluded that we act intentionally under a description. That was in 1963. By 1967 when "The Logical Form of Action Sentences" (Davidson 2001b) was published, he had revised his view, holding that action sentences only introduced existential quantifiers over events, but the "under a description" language has been with us in the philosophy of action ever since.

Glüer explains Davidson's response to the logical connection argument, which was to show that action explanation could not be causal explanation, on the grounds that events logically connected could not be causally connected. Davidson refuted the claim with the observation that no one could object to the statement that the cause of B caused B, and followed up with the observation that we must distinguish events and their descriptions. Their descriptions may be logically related while the events they describe are not. Singular causal statements Davidson argued are extensional. The same two events can be related causally while described in a variety of ways, some of which involve logical connections (e.g., 'the cause of B caused B') while others do not. Glüer goes on to say that "Davidson's central action theoretic claim . . . is: Reasons explanations can be understood *as singular causal statements*" (p. 187). This I think is a misunderstanding, however. For while Davidson says that singular causal statements are extensional ('The short circuit caused the fire'), he denies that explanations are. I can explain the fire by saying that there was a short circuit, but not by saying that there was an event reported in the *Times* the following morning. The same goes for explaining why someone did something, and that is why we can only explain actions in citing reasons by bringing the action under an appropriate description.

There are various historical strata in Davidson's work on action, and while Glüer's discussion cleverly interweaves various strands in Davidson's work, perhaps inevitably a bit of this differentiation is lost. Glüer notes that in ARC (1963) Davidson did not treat 'intention' as a genuine count noun but later (1978) recanted (Davidson 2001g) because treating 'with the intention of' as basic cannot accommodate prior intentions that are never acted on, and she links this with Davidson's account of practical reasoning and his solution to the, or, at any rate, a problem, of weakness of the will, which on Davidson's view lies in the logical gap between an "all things considered" judgment in favor of something (the output of practical reasoning) and an "all out" judgment in favor of it, which is, or is correlated with, an intention to do it. But the later introduction of intentions as states also affords Davidson a solution to the problem of internal deviant causal chains (at least in the cases he considered) which he had earlier (in 1973) despaired of solving (Davidson 2001d): the mountain climber – whose desire to let his companion fall to his death and his belief that letting go of the rope will lead to his death cause his hands to shake so that he lets go of the rope – never forms

an intention to let go of the rope. Another late modification (a description of a modification, perhaps more accurately) of his account of the logical form of action sentences helps to solve some other problems involving action and event individuation. In "Adverbs of Action" (Davidson 1985), Davidson proposed adding a second quantifier over events of which an agent is a primitive agent (her only actions, according to Davidson, namely, what she does but not by doing anything else). Thus, 'Sam sings Yankee Doodle in F major', now separating case roles, comes out as $(\exists f)(\exists e)(agent(f, Sam)$ & $causes(f, e)$ and $singing(e)$ and $of(e,$ Yankee Doodle) and $in(e, F major))$ (for more detail see (Ludwig 2010)). This was implicit even in Davidson's earliest work in ARC. This helps with the problem described in page 177 of an astronaut singing in F major while traveling to Venus. What she does to cause a singing event (move her mouth, tongue and larynx in a certain way) and what she does to cause her to move to Venus (operate the controls of the spaceship, perhaps), do not occupy the same spatio-temporal regions, and neither do the products of those two sets of primitive actions. We thus do not have to admit that she travels in F major or sings to Venus. This is not to vindicate Davidson's late conversion to Quine's criterion for individuating events by spatio-temporal location but just to indicate he has resources for responding to some of the objections that have been leveled against his account on its basis.

Chapter 5 provides a nice overview of Davidson's argument against radically different conceptual schemes, of Davidson's rejection of epistemic intermediaries, and of his late appeal to triangulation to solve the object of thought problem, as well as some problems for the appeal. The argument against radically different conceptual schemes comes down to, as Glüer puts it, the claim that our "best intuitions as to how to apply the concept of truth to sentences are formulated in Tarski's Convention T. And Convention T makes essential use of the concept of translation" (p. 217). Does that help? Convention T does make use of the concept of translation, namely, translation into the metalanguage. So for another to have a language, there must be a truth theory for it, and so a translation of its sentences into some metalanguage. But why must it be a language we can understand? We are back where we started. The idea of triangulation is to identify what someone is thinking about as the closest common cause of common responses between two speakers who respond to it and to each other; in the absence of this, nothing determines a sufficient unique object of thought, and thought is not possible. Two speakers interacting are required for thought by another route on Davidson's view also, for Davidson held that to have a belief one must have the concept of belief, and one can have that concept only in the context of communication. Glüer does not, I think, fully bring out why Davidson thinks this. The reason lies in a tension in the Principle of Charity between finding a speaker largely right about her environment and finding her as coherent as possible. Sometimes we have to see another as having false beliefs, getting it wrong from our point of view about our

shared world, in order to see her as conforming better to the constitutive ideal of rationality. As Glüer notes, there are problems for both parts of the argument: it is not clear that there is any unique closest cause (or that if there is that it is the right one!), and it is not clear why it is only communication that would suffice to give scope to the concept of error.

Chapter 6 provides an especially nice discussion of Davidson's argument for anomalous monism, the thesis that there are no strict psychophysical laws but that every mental event is identical with some physical event, and the tensions this generates with other aspects of Davidson's views, as well as the resources Davidson has for responding.

I have organized my discussion around what I take to be some of the most important themes in Davidson's philosophy but also around some points of disagreement and some points where I think something more may contribute to a fuller picture. This is also the only way to keep what I have to say rather short: the small points of disagreement stand out only against a vast background of agreement far too extensive to touch on. *Donald Davidson: A Short Introduction* is a thoroughly admirable introduction to Davidson's philosophical project. Davidson is extremely well served by it. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants a sure-footed guide to Davidson's overall vision, to the intricacies of its execution and its structure, to its insights, and to the tensions and problems to which it gives rise.

References

DAVIDSON, D. 1985, "Adverbs of Action", in: B. Vermazen and M. Hintikka, eds, *Essays On Davidson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 230–241.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001a, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", in *Essays on Actions and Events*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 3–20. Original edition, 1963.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001b, "The Logical Form of Action Sentences", in: *Essays on Actions and Events*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 105–121. Original edition, 1967.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001c, "Truth and Meaning", in: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 17–42. Original edition, 1967.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001d, "Freedom to Act", in: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 63–82. Original edition, 1973.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001e, "Radical Interpretation", in: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 125–140. Original edition, 1973.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001f, "Reply to Foster", in: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 171–179. Original edition, 1976.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001g, "Intending", in: *Essays on Actions and Events*, New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 83–102. Original edition, 1978.

DAVIDSON, D. 2001h, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. New York: Clarendon Press, pp. 137–153. Original edition, 1983.

DAVIDSON, D. 2005, *Truth and Predication*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

LEPORE, E. and LUDWIG, K. 2005, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LUDWIG, K. 2010, "Adverbs of Action and Logical Form", in: T. O'Connor and C. Sandis, eds, *Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 40–49.

Ludwig, K. and Lepore, E. 2013, "Truth in the Theory of Meaning", in: E. Lepore and K. Ludwig, eds, *A Companion to Donald Davidson*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 175–190.

Kirk Ludwig
ludwig@indiana.edu
Philosophy Department, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

Kevin O'Regan, *Why Red Doesn't Sound Like a Bell. Understanding the Feel of Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 224 pp., £22.99, ISBN 978-0-19-977522-4 (Hardback).

According to sensori-motor views of perception, perception is constituted by the picking-up of regularities through the active exploration of the environment. In this book, O'Regan wants to overcome one oft-mentioned limit of these views, which is that they do not account for conscious feel, which accompanies our perception. According to him, the fact that our brains are tuned to objective laws is sufficient to explain consciousness. The quality of red, for example, can be explained by the laws which relate the actual or expected movements of our eyes or heads to expected changes in the sensory input coming into our eyes; the quality of a bell sound can be explained by the laws which relate our actual or expected movements to expected changes in the auditory input. Once we have picked-up these sensori-motor regularities, we can run them off line, even when we don't move. This important difference between O'Regan's claims and other sensori-motor accounts is the point that has attracted most attention from commentators (see O'Regan and Block 2012, for an example). I think it's also important to reflect on the overall explanatory project attempted by O'Regan.

Explaining why red does not sound like a bell seems like a strange explanatory project. We know it doesn't. Red, after all, does not sound like anything at all. Therefore the fact that red does not sound like a bell simply follows. However, the main point of Kevin O'Regan's book is to make the associated question less absurd, and even to use the answer to it to solve some philosophical problems. An obvious way to make the question more meaningful is to ask why the visual experience of red (or any other colour) is distinct from the auditory experience of a bell (or any other sound). In other words, why does our awareness seem to divide into kinds or families of conscious experiences (what O'Regan calls 'their conscious feel' and others would call their phenomenal characters)? Addressing this question is not the only ambition of the book. By explaining the differences between kinds or families of conscious experiences, for example, between visual and auditory experiences, the second ambition is to explain the very nature of conscious feels.