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Radical Misinterpretation: A Reply to Stoutland

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DISCUSSION

Radical Misinterpretation: A Reply to Stoutland

Ernie Lepore and Kirk Ludwig

Frederick Stoutland's critical notice of *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality* appeared in the December 2006 issue of this journal (Vol. 14, no. 4). It would be fair to say that it is a hostile review. While we have no wish to engage in polemics, given the tone of the notice and its content, it may be worthwhile to review its main contentions.

There appear to be three main complaints, along with a number of smaller complaints, intended to support the main ones. They are:

(1) Lepore and Ludwig have misinterpreted Davidson;
(2) consequently their criticisms of him miss the mark,
(3) and make him out to be a philosopher of less stature and importance than he is.

On the last of these, we will only say that we take Davidson to be a philosopher of the first rank, and this explains why we have spent so much of our time and energy in writing about him and in writing under his inspiration. There is no greater mark of respect for a philosopher than to spend time critically engaged with his work. Nor is it a reason to think that a philosopher is not of the first rank if he fails to carry off with complete success a novel, ambitious, imaginative, and transformative project. Kant's project indisputably failed. Yet he is a philosopher of major historical importance whose work continues to be relevant to contemporary philosophy. If Stoutland believes that he must save Davidson from any criticism because he thinks that will threaten his stature as a philosopher of the first rank, he is simply mistaken.

The force of (2) obviously hinges on the correctness of (1), so let us consider in what ways Stoutland maintains that we have misinterpreted Davidson. In fact, there are numerous mistakes in Stoutland's review both

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about Davidson and about the book. Stoutland raises some important interpretive issues as well, though he does not note that they were dealt with in the book, and we will come to those in due course.

I

The first topic Stoutland takes up is Davidson's work on theories of meaning. Stoutland focuses on two things: the role of the concept of truth in Davidson's work and the role of compositionality. On the first, Stoutland says,

> [Ludwig and Lepore] fail to note the philosophical significance of Davidson's central point that meaning is *truth*-based, which means that truth was a central concept in all his work.
>
> (p. 580)

It is far from clear to us what Stoutland has in mind here. We quite obviously did not fail to note that a truth theory plays a central role in Davidson's work on providing compositional meaning theories for natural languages. We quite obviously did not fail to note that the confirmation of a truth theory for a speaker's language goes by way of identifying hold-true attitudes toward sentences as a first step in establishing candidate theorems for a truth theory for a speaker's language. What does Stoutland have in mind? Something he goes on to say provides a clue:

> [a] He held that the meaning of a sentence *is* the conditions in the world under which it is true – objectively true
>
> (p. 580)

> [b] they reject what follows immediately from Davidson's emphasis on truth, namely, the crucial centrality of *sentences* in a meaning theory. … That is reflected in the meaning theory in that its *theorems* specify the meaning – the truth conditions – of *sentences*, theorems we verify by observing a speaker's linguistic behaviour. The meaning of *terms*, by contrast – what they refer to or are true of – is specified by the *axioms*, which are verified only insofar as they yield verified theorems.
>
> (pp. 580–1)

There are two mistakes here, one about Davidson and one about the book. We begin with the mistake about Davidson.

In [a] Stoutland says that the meaning of a sentence is identical with the conditions in the world under which it is true. It is not clear what he means

by 'the conditions in the world under which it is true', but 'conditions' is a count noun, and these conditions are located in the world, so it looks as if Stoutland means us to understand that in the world there are things which are conditions, and these are the meanings of sentences. But also these are conditions under which sentences are true. It follows from this, it seems, that false sentences do not have meanings, and, hence, are not meaningful, since there are no conditions in the world under which they are true. This is clearly not something Davidson held.

But perhaps Stoutland does not really intend what the words here suggest. Perhaps, instead, he intends to say that Davidson holds that the meaning of a sentence is identical with its truth conditions, where 'truth conditions' applies to some kind of entity available for both true and false sentences, perhaps something akin to possible states of affairs or possible facts. This would allow false sentences to have meanings as well as true sentences.

However, this is not Davidson's view either. Davidson rejected the view that we needed to assign any sort of entity to sentences in providing meaning theories for natural languages. He did not reify truth conditions and identify them as the meanings of sentences. He had no use for facts and he had no use for possible facts either (see 'True to the Facts', in *ITI*, ch. 3). When he uses the term 'truth conditions', it is in contexts in which it is clear that he has in mind canonical theorems of a truth theory for a language, as, for example, when he says,

> the theory has been characterized as issuing in an infinite flood of sentences each giving the truth conditions of a sentence; we only need to ask, in sample cases, whether what the theory avers to be the truth conditions for a sentence really are.
>
> (*ITI*, pp. 25–6)

How does the truth theory give the truth conditions of a sentence? By its canonical theorems, and those theorems are of the form (if the language is context-insensitive)

(T) *S* is true iff *p*.

There is clearly no assignment of an entity to a sentence here. To 'give the truth conditions of a sentence' is to produce a sentence of this form in which the sentence that replaces '*p*' in the metalanguage *translates* the sentence '*S*' refers to. We warn against misinterpretation of talk of 'truth conditions' in n. 21 on p. 32 of the book. It is a particularly egregious mistake about Davidson.

There may be yet another thought behind (a). This is that Davidson thought that any sentence which replaces '*p*' in (T) and yields a true

sentence serves as well as any other in 'giving the meaning' of *S*. But this is clearly incorrect. In the famous passage in 'Truth and Meaning' in which Davidson introduces the suggestion that we can use a truth theory to circumvent the problems facing traditional approaches to providing 'a satisfactory account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words' (*ITI*, p. 17), Davidson specifies a necessary condition on success:

> the condition we have placed on satisfactory theories of meaning is in essence Tarski's Convention *T* that tests the adequacy of a formal semantical definition of truth.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 23)

Convention *T* requires that '*p*' in (T) be replaced by a sentence in the metalanguage that translates *S*. It follows that not just any sentence in place of '*p*' which makes (T) true will do. A further difficulty can be noted with this, namely, that, on the proposal under consideration, a single sentence could be used to 'give the truth conditions' of every true sentence, and a single sentence could be used to 'give the truth conditions' of every false sentence. This is not Davidson's view.

In [b], Stoutland repeats the mistake about reified truth conditions being meanings, but he also makes a mistake about the book. Nothing we say in the book is in conflict with the view that word meaning is not prior to sentence meaning. Nor is anything we say in the first part of the book incompatible with Davidson's views about radical interpretation, or with the view that to confirm a truth theory for another speaker we identify what sentences he utters or holds true. Stoutland doesn't offer any evidence to the contrary, and since we can't quote the first part of the book here, we ask you just to take our word for it.

What we believe has happened is that Stoutland has mistaken the import of a constraint we introduce in part I on the axioms of truth theories for them to meet Tarski's Convention T or an analogue for natural languages. We discuss what constraints may be put on a truth theory so that it can issue in theorems which can be used to interpret utterances of sentences in the language and reveal at the same time the compositional structure of those sentences – that is, as Davidson puts it, 'how the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings of words' (*ITI*, p. 17). We specify a condition which uncontroversially suffices, namely, that the axioms of the theory are what we define as 'interpretive' (*DD*, ch. 4, sec. 3). This definition of an interpretive axiom and the constraint we introduce in terms of it are completely neutral with respect to how one confirms an empirical theory for another speaker, and they are perfectly compatible with the indeterminacy of interpretation, i.e., with what are intuitively quite different theories at the level

of axioms and of theorems capturing equally well the facts of the matter about a speaker's language. If Davidson is right about the indeterminacy of interpretation, then it would show that there were many different theories whose axioms met the requirement that they be interpretive. But we believe that Stoutland has supposed that this condition we propose is itself a denial of the indeterminacy of interpretation on the grounds of the determinacy of word meaning and its priority to sentence meaning. But it is no more a denial of the indeterminacy of interpretation than is Davidson's own appeal to Tarski's Convention *T*, and it makes no claim at all about the priority of word to sentence meaning.

Stoutland next takes issue with our discussion of compositionality. He says,

> [c] For Davidson … compositionality is not a requirement on language but on a *theory* of language since what language must be like to be learnable is not a question to be answered by philosophy. … Lepore and Ludwig, however, take compositionality to be a requirement on language itself
>
> (p. 581)

> [d] [1] they think that a meaning theory should *explain* our capacity to understand sentences: we understand their meaning on the basis of understanding the meaning of their terms and their semantic structure. [2] While recognizing Davidson's restricted appeal to compositionality in what they call his 'initial project', they argue that he also (should have) had an 'extended project' that provided 'insight into what it was for any of the terms of a language to have the meanings they do'
>
> (p. 582)

> [e] There is abundant evidence that Davidson rejected this construal of his theory of meaning. [1] He was explicit that such a theory is not a psychological explanation of linguistic competence or of our understanding of language. A meaning theory for a learnable language must be compositional in a sense that is consistent with (indeed derivative from) its being holistic, but [2] whether the structure of what goes on in our mind/brain is compositional is not a question for a meaning theory but for science. [3] He also was explicit in rejecting a 'building-block theory' in favour of 'a version of the holistic approach' that means 'we must give up the concept of reference as basic to an empirical theory of language'. Lepore and Ludwig's assertion, however, that an interpretive

> meaning theory must have the right axioms that are themselves interpretive makes reference basic.
>
> (p. 583)

Again, these quotations show mistakes both about Davidson's views and about the book. In [c], it is not quite clear what Stoutland means in saying that we take compositionality to be a requirement on language itself. If he means that we think that there cannot be non-compositional languages, he is mistaken. What is it for a language to be compositional? As we understand it, it is for a language to admit of a division into semantically primitive and semantically complex expressions, so that the semantically complex expressions are understood on the basis of understanding the semantically primitive expressions and rules governing their combination. Of course, it is possible for there to be languages which consist only of semantically primitive expressions, a series of one-word sentences, for example, with no structure and with no recursive syntax. Our view is that natural languages are compositional, however, and that is Davidson's view as well. Davidson defines 'semantical primitive' as follows:

> Let us call an expression a *semantical primitive* provided the rules which give the meaning for the sentences in which it does not appear do not suffice to determine the meaning of the sentences in which it does appear … a learnable language has a finite number of semantical primitives.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 9)

Natural languages are learnable. Natural languages have an infinite number of non-synonymous expressions. They have a finite number of semantical primitives, if Davidson is right. So some of the expressions in natural languages are complex, and understood in virtue of rules for determining the meaning of complexes on the basis of their parts. So Davidson held that natural languages are compositional.

How could Stoutland have got it so wrong? We believe that the answer is found in passages [d] and [e]. Davidson in a variety of places denies that he is interested in the psychological mechanism underlying language use or language acquisition. This seems to be what Stoutland has in mind in [2] and [3] in [e]. He has supposed that the claim that natural languages are compositional is in conflict with this claim. But it is not. The claim that natural languages are compositional puts certain constraints on any adequate theory of the psychological mechanisms of language use. But this is not the same thing as giving a theory of the psychological mechanisms of language use. As Davidson puts it, 'It is not appropriate to expect logical

considerations to dictate the route or mechanism of language acquisition, but we are entitled to consider in advance of empirical study what we shall count as knowing a language, how we shall describe the skill or ability of a person who has learned to speak a language' (*ITI*, pp. 7–8).

In [d], [1] is at best misleading. It is certainly true and Davidson recognized it as true – indeed, it is a major theme in his work in the theory of meaning – that we understand the meanings of complex expressions on the basis of understanding their components and mode of combination. When we hear a novel sentence, one we have never encountered before, we understand it. We do not understand it because we learned it as a whole, because we have never encountered it before. We understand it because we understand other sentences in which the words which appear in the novel sentence appear. And we understand how these words and how they are combined contribute to what we say using these sentences in general. This is the basis for our understanding sentences we have never encountered before. Davidson's learnability argument makes clear that this is his view:

> When we can regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of the sentence, we have an insight not only into what here is to be learned; we also understand how an infinite aptitude can be encompassed by finite accomplishments. For suppose that a language lacks this feature; then no matter how many sentences a would-be speaker learns to produce and understand, there will remain others whose meanings are not given by the rules already mastered. It is natural to say such a language is unlearnable.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 8)

The finite accomplishments have to be related to the infinite aptitude. How? By rules already mastered. Rules attaching to what? To the semantical primitives. Rules mastered by whom? By the speaker of the language. What does the mastery consist in? It consists in the speaker's dispositions to use various words in various systematic ways. When a speaker learns a new word, a new adjective, for example, he acquires a disposition to use it in accordance with a rule attaching to it in virtue of its grammatical category that determines how it combines with other words, given their grammatical categories, and so on. Is this to give a theory of the psychological mechanisms of word use? No. It is to say what any such theory would be a theory of, i.e., what complex set of dispositions the theory would be held accountable to.

What is the relation of a meaning theory to this? A meaning theory is responsible to the speaker's dispositions to use words. We want it to reveal structure where there is structure, and not where there is not. Inferences which are valid in virtue of structure should be shown to be valid in virtue

of structure. It is absolutely clear from Davidson's work on logical form in natural languages that he regards this as the *sine qua non* of a correct account of logical form. 'The Logical Form of Action Sentences' (*EAE*, ch. 6) is an example of this par excellence.

[2] in [d] embodies a different kind of mistake about the book. Davidson asks 'What is it for words to mean what they do?' in the first line of the introduction to *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. This clearly involves both an answer to the question what it is for semantical primitives to mean what they do and an answer to the question what it is for complex expressions to mean what they do. These two questions are interconnected, of course, and Davidson aimed to answer them together by describing the structure of a theory and a method of confirming it which would suffice for it to be used to interpret any utterance of a speaker of a natural language. In the book, we separate two questions. The first is 'how the meanings of sentences [complex expressions generally] depend on the meanings of words' (*ITI*, p. 17). If we grant the meanings of words, and show how we can understand complex expressions on their basis, we have answered this question. The second is what it is for primitive expressions to mean what they do. Davison's answer to this question is that it is revealed in how we could confirm a compositional meaning theory for a speaker, in particular, from the standpoint of a radical interpreter. The first is the initial project, the second the extended. Stoutland has evidently not understood what the extended project is.

[3] to the end in [e] embodies a number of mistakes. First, Davidson's remark about building-block theories is about theories of language acquisition. It is contrasted with the view that 'we cannot accurately describe the first steps toward [language] conquest as learning part of the language; rather it is a matter of partly learning' (*ITI*, p. 7). This is connected with the question whether reference is basic only in that if the building-block theory of language acquisition were correct, we would have to accept reference as basic. It doesn't follow from rejecting the building-block theory that reference is a theoretical concept, as Stoutland suggests. Second, the last sentence expresses the confusion we noted earlier about the role of interpretive axioms as a constraint on a theory of truth. This is, we think, a rather basic confusion Stoutland has about the book, and it explains a number of the other mistakes.

II

Stoutland also takes issue with our discussion of radical interpretation. In the book, we focus attention on the following proposition, (P).

> (P): One can come to know something sufficient to interpret a speaker from the evidential position of the radical interpreter.

Stoutland admits that this is something that Davidson holds. He writes:

> As it stands, (P) is a reasonable formulation of something central to Davidson's point of view, which he took to follow from Quine's oft repeated claim that meaning is public and observable.[1] Both Quine and Davidson thought that claim was not a philosophical thesis requiring proof but a commonplace that, properly understood, would be acceptable to all. Quine, wrote Davidson, 'revolutionized our understanding of verbal communication by taking seriously the fact, obvious enough in itself, that there can be no more to meaning than an adequately equipped person can learn and observe; the interpreter's point of view is therefore the revealing one to bring to the subject'.
>
> (p. 584)

But (P) is not a commonplace, involving as it does the notion of the evidential position of the radical interpreter, hardly a commonplace notion, on which more in a moment. What is a commonplace is that people do come to know something sufficient to interpret others and that the behaviour of others plays a central role in this. It is clearly a substantive philosophical thesis that the position of the radical interpreter is sufficient for correct interpretation of another. It may be correct, or it may not be correct, but it is not a commonplace. Stoutland writes,

> That claim remains a commonplace because, although radical interpretation is a philosopher's invention, it is an idealized and purified version of the ordinary interpretation we might engage in, for instance, to justify a claim about what someone difficult to understand is really saying.
>
> (p. 584)

But whether it is 'an idealized and purified version of ordinary interpretation' or can be taken to model some important fundamental features of conditions on correct interpretation is precisely the question. By labelling it 'commonplace', Stoutland evidently thinks that he has put it beyond appropriate critical attention. It is supposed to be something we already know. Similarly, Kant might have said, it is obvious that the truths of geometry and arithmetic are both a priori and synthetic. Now we just have to understand what must be so given these obvious truths. End of discussion. On the contrary: it is on the starting points that we must focus the greatest attention.

Stoutland gives some further indication of the status he thinks (P) has in saying, 'It is central to [Davidson's] work, not as a foundational premise but

as a background assumption justified by its value in dealing with philosophical problems' (p. 585). This puts it in a somewhat different light. We are not quite sure what work the modifier 'background' is doing here, but the idea that an assumption may be justified by its fruits is certainly legitimate. We discuss precisely this point in chapter 11, section 2, in relation to the somewhat more specific question of justifying the principle of charity, which is essential to the truth of (P). About this we say:

> This is not … a question that can be answered in a short space, and is of a piece with an overall evaluation of the account of language and mind which Davidson offers. Our evaluation of it must therefore emerge in the details of our analysis of Davidson's overall position.
>
> (*DD*, p. 203)

In the book, we consider two ways in which to understand Davidson's project. The first we call modest and the second ambitious. The modest project conditionalizes on (P), that is, it considers what must be so if (P) is true, and its conclusions are likewise conditional. The ambitious project includes (P) as a premise (or call it an assumption, if you like). We give reasons to think that Davidson is engaged in the ambitious project. It looks as if Stoutland agrees, except that he doesn't think that Davidson's fundamental assumption stands in need of any defence, and, indeed, seems to take it to be evidence of a misinterpretation of Davidson that anyone should raise a question about it. That is certainly a short way with critical discussion. In any case, it is hardly clear that Davidson himself thought that it was an assumption that stood in need of no argument, for he offers arguments for it (see the quotation below from p. 117 of *SIO*).

In considering the ambitious construal of the project, we ask what reason there is to accept (P), and what sorts of reasons could be advanced which would be appropriate for Davidson's aims. We assume that these are reasonable questions to ask. We ask whether what is required is an a posteriori or a priori argument for (P). An a posteriori argument would presuppose some way of confirming a correct interpretation theory for another that bypassed radical interpretation. But if radical interpretation is supposed to model our basic epistemic position, this is not possible. So the argument must be a priori.

Stoutland takes us to task for setting the stage in terms of the distinction between a posteriori and a priori knowledge, since Davidson has said that he follows Quine in rejecting the analytic–synthetic distinction and the allied a priori–a posteriori distinction (p. 585). Stoutland says that we seem not to take Davidson seriously on this. But he doesn't note that we discuss this issue or what we say about it.

Davidson quite evidently intends to be giving a philosophical account of the nature of language and thought. He does not do field work. He employs characteristically philosophical arguments. He employs the sort of language which philosophers typically employ when offering philosophical as opposed to empirical arguments:

> What we *should* demand … is that the evidence for the theory be in principle publicly accessible, and that it not assume in advance the concepts to be illuminated. The requirement that the evidence be publicly accessible is not due to an atavistic yearning for behavioristic or verficationist foundations, but to the fact that what is to be explained is a social phenomenon … the correct interpretation of one person's speech by another must *in principle* be possible … what has to do with correct interpretation, meaning, and truth conditions is necessarily based on available evidence … language is intrinsically social … meaning is entirely determined by observable behavior, even readily observable behavior. That meanings are decipherable is not a matter of luck; public availability is a constitutive aspect of language.
>
> (SCT, p. 314)

Davidson does not shy from talk of what is necessary or what must be in principle possible, or what is constitutive of language or the propositional attitudes. He does not shy from talk of essential aspects of concepts, or conceptual ties, or modal claims, or whether something is even intelligible. Elsewhere he says:

> It should be emphasized that these maxims of interpretation are not mere pieces of useful or friendly advice; rather they are intended to externalize and formulate (no doubt very crudely) essential aspects of the common concepts of thought, affect, reasoning and action. *What could not be arrived at by these methods is not thought, talk, or actions*.
>
> (NBD, p. 92)

There are many other passages in a similar vein. For example (all these passages and others are quoted in the book):

> There are conceptual ties between the attitudes and behavior which are sufficient, given enough information about actual and potential behavior, to allow correct inference to the attitudes.
>
> (*SIO*, p. 100)

> I have been engaged in a conceptual exercise aimed at revealing the dependencies among our basic propositional attitudes at a level fundamental enough to avoid the assumption that we can come to grasp them – or intelligibly attribute them to others – one at a time.
>
> (*POR*, p. 166)

> If we are to establish the essentially public character of language, we need an entirely different sort of argument. … The argument that follows … does end with what may be Wittgenstein's conclusion: language is necessarily a social affair.
>
> (*SIO*, p. 117)

Davidson does not even shy from talk of the a priori:

> What makes interpretation possible, then, is the fact that we can dismiss a priori the chance of massive error. A theory of interpretation cannot be correct that makes a man assent to very many false sentences: it must generally be the case that a sentence is true when a speakers holds it to be.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 169)

What we say about all of this is more nuanced than Stoutland indicates. Indeed, Stoutland does not indicate that we say anything at all about it. Clearly, we want to make room for a distinction in Davidson between constitutive truths or things that must be so in principle, or truths about the natures of things, etc., and such truths as that there are a certain number of planets, or that it is colder in December in New York than in June, and between the methods by which we arrive at the one sort of truth and the other. What we say is the following:

> We will, in our discussion of the distinction between the modest and ambitious programs, continue to employ the traditional terms 'a priori' and 'a posteriori'. However, for our purposes, these terms could be replaced with *any* pair that captures the difference between the kind of ground involved in establishing truths constitutive of a subject-matter, and in establishing truths which are not. It is clear enough that that distinction is at work, and *plays the role* in Davidson's work of the traditional distinction between knowledge of conceptual and non-conceptual truths.
>
> (*DD*, p. 169, n. 139)

One reason we take Stoutland's review to be a hostile rather than just a critical review is his failure to note at crucial points that there is any discussion at all in the book of certain issues, and his failure to note crucial things we actually say about them. This certainly gives rise to a distorted picture of the argument of the book, one which is not due just to misinterpretation.

In the book, after considerable discussion of the structure of radical interpretation and the role and interpretation of the principle of charity, we argue that, in the light of this, it looks as if, from the point of view of the radical interpreter himself, he is not in a position to arrive at a correct interpretation. The structure of the argument disappears in Stoutland's discussion (pp. 585–6):

> Lepore and Ludwig's objection to the *modest* project, which *assumes* (P) is contingently true, is that it is in fact false: 'We cannot confirm anything knowledge of which (we would be justified in believing) would suffice for interpretation from the radical interpreter's standpoint.' Their argument is that since (in their view) only one interpretation of a speaker can be correct, and since the available evidence is always consistent with alternative interpretations, we are never in a position to determine the correct interpretation. They insist that this is genuine *under*determination because we cannot construe alternative interpretations as different ways of specifying the same facts. The latter would be indeterminacy, and although that is Davidson's view, they reject it: 'the evidence available to the radical interpreter, together with the constraints he can legitimately bring to bear on his task, genuinely underdetermine the theories he can confirm, and the appearance of underdetermination cannot be accounted for by appeal to the indeterminacy of interpretation' (*DD*, p. 222).

We should note first that the objection to (P) is in the context not of the modest but of the ambitious project. Also, we do not characterize the modest project as assuming that (P) is contingently true, but just as accepting it for the sake of argument. Putting this aside, Stoutland says that our argument starts with the assumption that only one interpretation could be correct. But this is an egregious mistake. The argument develops a problem from the standpoint of the radical interpreter, a conflict that emerges from careful attention to the structure of the project itself. We consider as well whether the measurement analogy which Davidson appeals to can solve the problem, and we point out that it can only if we assume that the interpreter's language marks more distinctions that can be marked in the language of speaker being interpreted. But since another could speak the interpreter's language, but that that was so could not emerge as a determinate fact from his standpoint, the analogy with measurement

theory fails to resolve the difficulty. We cannot repeat all the arguments here. The discussion of the structure of radical interpretation is explained in chapters 11–14. The principal argument is given in chapter 15. The arguments may or may not be correct. But they are not discussed in Stoutland's review, despite the impression Stoutland gives that he is addressing them.

Stoutland objects (p. 586) that we 'set a very high standard for the success of radical interpretation, insisting it must succeed for *any* speaker in *any* possible environment', and that this enables us

> to construct outré thought experiments that exhibit situations in which it is not possible for radical interpretation to succeed. But this is irrelevant to Davidson, who wrote in reply to Fodor and Lepore:
>
> > I do not think that I have ever argued for the claim that radical interpretability is a condition of interpretability. Not only have I never argued that every language is radically interpretable; I have not even argued that every language can be understood by someone other than its employer, since it would be possible to have a private code no one else could break. I don't think, and have not argued, that radical interpretation of natural languages *must* be possible; I have argued only that it *is* possible.[2]

Astonishingly, Stoutland does not note that we quote this passage and discuss it at length (see *DD*, pp. 170–3). We urge readers who are interested in the interpretive issues to look at the pages in the book we have cited. In brief, there are interpretive difficulties in the passage itself, there is abundant evidence that Davidson thinks that (P) is constitutive of what it is to be speaker, including some of the passages quoted above, and, finally, much of the interest of Davidson's project, we argue, hinges on his holding that (P) is a truth about essential aspects of the concept of a speaker. Finally, what we imagine is the outré thought experiment that Stoutland has in mind (*DD*, p. 235) is not used for the purpose which he evidently imagines. It is used to illustrate something that is true of actual speakers. The difficulty facing the radical interpreter arises with respect to any speaker whatsoever. Stoutland simply misunderstands the structure of the argument.

Stoutland takes issue with how we characterize the evidential position of the radical interpreter. We say that the radical interpreter's evidential position is restricted to behavioural evidence neutrally described. Stoutland writes,

> That is not Davidson's view: 'What I have tried to do is to give an account of meaning (interpretation) that makes no essential use of

> unexplained *linguistic* concepts. … In saying what an interpreter knows it [may be] necessary to use a so-called intensional notion – one that consorts with belief and intention and the like' (*ITI*, p. 175). The prime example is describing a speaker as holding true a sentence, but it can also include 'adding another dose of sympathy or imagination or … learning more about the things the subject knows about' (*CPM*, p. 232), which though not behaviouristic are legitimate instances of behavioural evidence.
>
> (pp. 586–7)

The first of these quotations is from 'Reply to Foster'. But this is in reply to the following charge:

> Foster thinks my grand plan is in ruins because in trying to harness the claim of T-theoriticy to secure interpretation I must use an intentional notion like 'states' in 'The interpreter knows that some T-theory states that …'
>
> (*ITI*, p. 175)

This is not about what evidence the interpreter has ultimately to go on, but about what notions are used in describing what knowledge the interpreter has about the T-theory which enables him to use it to interpret a speaker. To quote this here shows a misunderstanding of its point in the original context. In 'Radical Interpretation'. Davidson describes his project as one that moves from knowing what a speaker's hold-true attitudes are to the confirmation of a truth theory for his language. He says, 'It is an attitude an interpreter may plausibly be taken to be able to identify before he can interpret, since he may know that a person intends to express a truth in uttering a sentence without having any idea what truth' (*ITI*, p. 135). He clearly then does not take 'holding true' attitudes to be our ultimate evidence. In 'Thought and Talk', he says

> The interlocking of the theory of action with interpretation will emerge in another way if we ask how a method of interpretation is tested. In the end, the answer must be that it helps bring order into our understanding of behavior.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 161)

But not behaviour that is already interpreted, for that would presuppose that we already had a theory of interpretation. Rather, it is behaviour described neutrally with respect to what it expresses. Davidson makes clear

that holding true is something we arrive at on the basis of more primitive evidence, for he goes on to say:

> But at an intermediate stage, we can see that the attitude of *holding true* or *accepting as true*, as directed towards sentences, must play a central role in giving form to a theory.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 161)

Further, Davidson says, 'Everyday linguistic and semantic concepts are part of an intuitive theory for organizing more primitive data, so only confusion can result from treating these concepts and their supposed objects as if they had a life of their own' (*ITI*, p. 143). But of course Davidson thinks that concepts of the propositional attitudes are components of that intuitive theory, for he does not think that we can make sense of attributions of propositional attitudes to anything apart from seeing it as a speaker. Again: 'the totality of behavioral evidence, actual and potential … is all that matters to questions of meaning and communication' (*ITI*, p. 227). Recall the passage quoted above: 'What we *should* demand … is that the evidence for the theory be in principle publicly accessible, and that it not assume in advance the concepts to be illuminated' (SCT, p. 314). Again, a passage already quoted: 'There are conceptual ties between the attitudes and behavior which are sufficient, given enough information about actual and potential behavior, to allow correct inference to the attitudes' (*SIO*, p. 100). Here it is clear that access to the attitudes is said to go by way of inference from behaviour in virtue of conceptual ties. The behaviour clearly is not to be conceived of as described in terms of what attitudes it expresses. Further, it would be strange to suppose that Davidson thought that what someone believes or wants is observable, even readily observable. In another place, Davidson says,

> Belief, like the other so-called propositional attitudes, is supervenient on facts of various sorts, behavioral, neurophysiological, biological, and physical…. The point is … understanding. We gain one kind of insight into the nature of the propositional attitudes when we relate them systematically to one another and to phenomena on other levels. As interpreters, we work our way into the whole system, depending much on the pattern of interrelationships.
>
> (*SIO*, p. 147)

A complete theory of interpretation includes both a theory of a speaker's language and a theory of his attitudes. As Davidson puts it in another place, 'A basic account of any of these concepts must start beyond or beneath them all, or at some point equidistant from them all' (*POR*, p. 152). The

fundamental intersubjective evidence we have is the speaker's dispositions to behaviour and the character of his environment. We look for the best overall fit of theory to the evidence. The ultimate evidence available to the radical interpreter is just what is intersubjectively available, and that is ultimately behaviour neutrally described. Davidson very often helps himself to an intermediate stage in this process in working through the implications of (P). But this does not mean that he thinks we have direct access to what people believe or intend, and so on, or even to their hold-true attitudes, which are just beliefs that sentences are true. These specific issues are in fact discussed at length in the book (see particularly *DD*, pp. 154–60), though Stoutland does not note this.

In connection with this, it should be noted that the difficulties raised for the success of radical interpretation in the book arise on the assumption that the radical interpreter can identify a speaker's hold-true attitudes. So the question is not pertinent to the issue that Stoutland seems to think it is.

Stoutland also claims that we

> give a distorted account of the procedure of the radical interpreter by construing it as like the traditional scheme for verifying a scientific theory. For Davidson, however, interpreting a speaker is nothing like verifying a scientific theory since, while both are third person, the concepts of interpretation must be sharply distinguished from scientific concepts. Radical interpretation, like interpretation generally, does not follow a fixed order. It is holistic in that no claim to knowledge is inextricable from other claims, no sentence is meaningful independently of other sentences, there are no attitudes except in the context of many others.
>
> (p. 587)

We are not clear what Stoutland has in mind here. We are not clear what he means by 'scientific concepts'. We did not use this term in the book. Perhaps Stoutland has in mind physical concepts. But we do not say that the concepts deployed in a theory of interpretation are physical concepts – far from it: we neither attribute that to Davidson nor believe it ourselves. Nor do we say that they are biological concepts, or chemical concepts, or geological concepts, or astronomical concepts, and so on.[3] We do not say that radical interpretation needs to follow a fixed order, and we note explicitly that 'one could imagine assembling first all of the relevant behavioral facts and considering the best overall fit of theory with evidence given our assumptions about the connection between prompting conditions and belief contents' (*DD*, p. 197). We are not sure what Stoutland intends by 'It is holistic in that no claim to knowledge is inextricable from other claims, no sentence is meaningful independently of other sentences', but we suspect

that it is something other than what this literally expresses. In any case, we do not attribute to Davidson or assert ourselves the view that attitudes can be identified apart from locating them in a network of interrelated attitudes, but rather the opposite (*DD*, pp. 211–13). There seems to us simply to be a number of puzzling misunderstandings about what the book says here.

Stoutland seems to be involved in a number of confusions also in the following paragraph (p. 587):

> Lepore and Ludwig maintain that, in spite of their argument that the modest project is a failure, it remains open whether the *ambitious* project, which construes (P) as an *a priori*, necessary truth, can succeed. They contend that a plausible *a priori* argument for (P) would show that radical interpretation *must* succeed in spite of the empirical evidence that it cannot. While this involves a strange notion of modality, it *is* their view: 'the evidence available to the radical interpreter … genuinely underdetermines the theories he can construct [and hence] radical interpretation is not possible … [But] our argument is still hostage to the possibility of providing an a priori argument for (P)' (*DD*, p. 222).

As noted above, we do not argue that the modest project is a failure. The modest project conditionalizes on (P). In arguing that there is a serious problem in understanding how (P) could be true from the point of view of the radical interpreter, we address the ambitious project. The suggestion that we are offering empirical evidence that (P) is false is strange. The argument focuses on the relation between the kind evidence that the interpreter has and what, from his point of view, he has to confirm, and concludes that, from his point of view, there is genuine underdetermination, which cannot in general be construed as indeterminacy on the model provided by the use of numbers in measurement theory. Perhaps Stoutland's mistake here is connected with his thinking that we are addressing the modest project and his earlier mischaracterization of that as holding that (P) is contingently true. As for our supposed strange notion of modality, what we say, projecting the conclusion we reach at the end of chapter 15 is, 'If this is correct [the evidence available to the radical interpreter, together with the constraints he can legitimately bring to bear on his task, genuinely underdetermines the theories he can confirm, and … the appearance of underdetermination cannot be accounted for by appeal to the indeterminacy of interpretation], radical interpretation is not possible, that is, presupposition (P) … is false…. However, our argument is still hostage to the possibility of providing an a priori argument for (P)' (*DD*, p. 222). We do not here say that there can be a sound a priori argument for (P) though (P) is not possible. Rather, we say that we give an argument for (P)'s not being possible, but the correctness of the argument may still be challenged by arguments which seem to show that

there are a priori grounds for (P). It is not uncommon in philosophy to find arguments on both sides of an issue which are a priori in character and seem plausible. When this happens, we do not say that we have conclusively settled the issue at least until we have examined both arguments carefully. Someone who thinks that this is a reasonable thing to do is not asserting that something can have a priori proof and be impossible.

Stoutland, despite thinking that Davidson treats (P) 'not as a foundational premise but as a background assumption justified by its value in dealing with philosophical problems', and that therefore it is a misunderstanding of Davidson either to look for arguments supporting it or so much as to question it, still seeks to show that we do not successfully argue that he has not established it. Stoutland focuses on the following assumption, for which we consider a number of arguments in Davidson's work (*DD*, p. 399):

> (E1) Necessarily, every thinker is in communication, or has been in communication and potentially is in communication, with others.

Davidson clearly gives arguments that support (E1), which would go a long way, if not all the way, toward establishing (P).

One of the central arguments Davidson gives we call the argument from the concept of error (*DD*, ch. 22, sec. 3). It will be useful to give the whole argument in showing what is wrong about Stoutland's response.

(D1) To have the concept of a belief, one must have the concept of error, or, what is the same thing, of objective truth (i.e., the way things are independently of how one believes them to be).

(D2) The claim that a creature possesses the concept of error, or objective truth, stands in need of grounding, i.e., we need some account of how a creature is able to have such a concept, what conditions must be in place in order for the creature to have it: this must take the form of explaining how there could be scope in the creature's behaviour or experience for application of the concept.

(D3) We can understand how a creature who was in communication with other creatures could have the concept of error, as a tool used in interpretation to achieve a better rational fit of a speaker's behaviour to the evidence we have for his beliefs and meanings; that is, the concept would have some work to do (it would have some scope for application) for interpreters of others' speech.

(D4) There is scope for the application of the concept of objective truth in a creature's behaviour or experience only if it is (or has been) in communication with others.

(D5) Therefore, from (D2)–(D4), to have the concept of error or objective truth one must be (or have been) in communication with others.

We make two main points about the argument. First, (D4) is doubtfully true. Scope for the application of the concept of objective truth in a creature's behaviour can arise in any circumstance in which we can make sense of the possibility of mistakes. This can occur with respect to our own past beliefs in the light of new information, it can occur in the context of the explanation of non-linguistic behaviour in others, and it can occur even in theoretical reasoning. Stoutland responds:

> They maintain, for example, that because it is 'easy to specify contexts in which there would be a point to deploying the concept of error which do not involve communication' (*DD*, p. 402), it follows that Davidson is wrong about the relation between the concept of belief and objective truth. But that does not follow since his view is that communication is necessary to master the concept of belief and error but not to apply it in every situation.
>
> (p. 588)

But, first, the passage quoted is directed against (D4), and not (D1), which is what expresses Davidson's view about the relation between the concepts of belief and of objective truth. We agree that (D4)'s being false does not show that (D1) is, but that was not something we maintained. And, second, the objection was not that if one is or has been or is potentially in communication with others, then there is scope for the application of the concept of error in non-communicative contexts, but that there is no reason to think that communication provides the only scope for application of the concept of error and therefore no reason to think that one could not have the concept independently of being in, or having been in, or potentially being in communication with others. The thesis that language is necessary for thought is not widely accepted. In considering an argument to establish that it is, which is what the argument above has as its final aim, by way of the assumptions that there must be scope for the application of the concept of error in experience, and that communication would provide such scope, it is pertinent to ask: could there be scope for the concept of error in a non-linguistic creature's experience? And there seems no particular difficulty in describing how there could be in some of the ways we have noted above.

The second point we make about the argument is that (D2) has a stronger and weaker reading. On the stronger, we can have a concept only if there is scope for its correct application in our experience; on the weaker, we can have a concept only if there is scope for its seemingly correct application in our

experience. We say, in more detail than we will here, that it is hard to see how the intuitive considerations support the stronger reading. Stoutland responds: 'Such a claim ignores the basic thrust of Davidson's anti-Cartesian point of view and the central role objective truth had even in his early writings' (p. 588). It is difficult to see this as engaging with the issue. This sort of response is typical of many of Stoutland's responses. We object that a premise in an argument has not been adequately justified. Stoutland responds: but clearly those considerations are at odds with the conclusions Davidson has drawn; he would therefore reject them, and they can have no force against his position. We are sure we all wish that it were so easy to defend our views.

Stoutland objects also to our treatment of the argument from triangulation and from other minds. The argument from triangulation goes as follows (*DD*, p. 406):

(F1) We can make sense of there being a determinate object of thought for a creature only if we can see it as a speaker triangulating with another speaker in communication about a common object of thought.

(F2) Nothing can have thoughts unless there can be determinate objects of its thoughts.

(F3) Therefore, nothing is a thinker unless it is a speaker which is in communication (or has been in communication) with another speaker.

We point out that this already presupposes the primacy of the third-person point of view, and so can't be used in support of it. Stoutland responds: 'That objection, however, ignores the distinctive holistic character of interpretation, which allows for tentative conclusions to support claims that can in turn be used to support the tentative conclusion, and so on' (p. 588). So far as we can tell, this is completely irrelevant to the point. We also point out that triangulation fails as a strategy for objectively determining the common object of thought for speakers because there remain too many common causes, even systematic common causes, of common responses. Stoutland's response is: 'The fact that we can misidentify the content of a speaker's belief does not entail that we do not generally get it right, nor does it rule out the point that getting it generally right is a precondition for making the kind of sense of each other that is required for having a coherent mental life' (p. 589). But the first clause here misrepresents the objection, and the second, while true, is not to the point.

The argument from other minds basically holds that the possibility of knowledge of other minds is required by interpretability, and that this requires that we can know others' minds on the basis of purely behavioural evidence. Granting the possibility of interpretability in principle, to put it briefly, we deny that it follows that justification proceeds wholly on the basis

of purely behavioural evidence, as we know both our own minds and that we are conspecifics with those we wish to interpret. The issues here are not unfamiliar. Stoutland's reply is that

> the argument from analogy assumes we can grasp the meaning of *terms* independently of being able to use them in sentences – that there is non-linguistic access to the reference of terms. Indeed, it assumes that one can grasp the meaning of psychological terms simply by immediate awareness of their objects, for example, by merely *having* a sensation or feeling (their example is embarrassment). Those assumptions are inconsistent with all Davidson's work, including his truth-based theory of meaning.
>
> (p. 590)

It is certainly not the case that the argument we sketch assumes that we can understand words independently of being able to use them in sentences. And it is not the case that the argument assumes that we can know the meanings of psychological terms simply by awareness of their objects. Terms are expressions in a public language, so of course understanding them involves knowing more than facts about one's own mind. Perhaps what Stoutland has in mind, however, is that the argument presupposes that we can have concepts of psychological states solely by being in them. But this isn't something the argument assumes either. Stoutland's mention of our reference to embarrassment (*DD*, p. 416) completely misconstrues it. We mentioned embarrassment simply in the context of an example emphasizing that we appeal to psychological attitudes in causal explanations. All the argument assumes is that we have psychological concepts, that we have knowledge of our own minds, that the character of our minds in general is biologically based, that we know other human beings are conspecifics, and that 'biologically based features of one member of a species are found in other members of the species' (*DD*, p. 415).

III

Stoutland also takes issue with our attributing to Davidson the view that the concepts deployed in interpretation, the concepts of meaning, truth, reference, satisfaction, and those involved in describing something as an agent, are what we call theoretical concepts, whose

> role of a theory of interpretation is to identify and systematize patterns in the behavior of speakers in relation to their environment.
>
> (*DD*, p. 11)

Stoutland says,

> They [Lepore and Ludwig] ascribe to him the view that the procedure of the radical interpreter in systematizing behavioural evidence *constitutes* the content of linguistic and psychological concepts, so that where there is no evidence, there is no language or thought. Given this construal of Davidson, it is understandable why they require proof that a very strong sense of radical interpretation can succeed.
>
> (p. 591)

But we never say 'the *procedure* of the radical interpreter in systematizing behavioural evidence constitutes the content of linguistic and psychological concepts', and we don't know what this could intelligibly be taken to mean. Stoutland says further that

> On [Lepore and Ludwig's] view, the concepts of interpretation have determinate objects, each of which has its own intrinsic nature.
>
> (p. 591)

This is not something we say, and it is unclear to us what Stoutland has in mind by it. He seems to connect it with the rejection of indeterminacy, and he asserts in response that there is indeterminacy. But we were actually concerned with what the grounds were for thinking that there was as much indeterminacy in interpretation as Davidson claims. So simply asserting that there is is a failure to engage with the arguments on either side.

Stoutland appears to accept that the concepts of satisfaction and reference are theoretical, but denies that Davidson thought that other concepts used in interpretation theory are theoretical. He says,

> Davidson did hold that evidence constitutes the content of certain concepts, notably reference and satisfaction, which are 'theoretical constructs [whose] role is theoretical, and so we know all there is to know about them when we know how they operate to characterize truth' (*ITI*, p. 223), truth being the point where evidence bears on the meaning theory…. But he did not claim that behavioural evidence *constitutes* the content of other linguistic and psychological concepts, those that are required to be a competent speaker.
>
> (p. 592)

(The phrase 'theoretical constructs' appears in line 3 on p. 223 of *ITI*, and the rest of the quoted material in the last two lines on the page.) However,

it is clear that Davidson simply contradicts Stoutland's claim in the last sentence that ordinary linguistic concepts are not theoretical in 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning' (we quoted this in section II above):

> Everyday linguistic and semantic concepts are part of an intuitive theory for organizing more primitive data, so only confusion can result from treating these concepts and their supposed objects as if they had a life of their own.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 143)

Furthermore, it is well known that Davidson holds that thought is not possible without language, or, of course, language without thought. The attribution of meanings and a full complement of psychological attitudes go together, or not at all, on Davidson's view. It is not as if one could first identify a speaker's psychological attitudes and then interpret the speaker's language, or vice versa. Davidson says, for example: 'Attributions of belief are as publicly verifiable as interpretations, being based on the same evidence' (*ITI*, p. 153). Furthermore,

> Adverting to beliefs and desires to explain action is … a way of fitting action into a pattern of behavior made coherent by the theory. This does not mean, of course, that beliefs are nothing but patterns of behavior, or that the relevant patterns can be defined without using the concepts of belief and desire. Nevertheless, there is a clear sense in which attributions of belief and desire, and hence teleological explanations of belief and desire, are supervenient on behavior more broadly described.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 159)

And assignments of meaning to another's sentences is a part of a larger theory that includes attributions of attitudes to the speaker that make sense of him as a rational agent:

> it should not be thought that a theory of interpretation will stand alone, for as we noticed, there is no chance of telling when a sentence is held true without being able to attribute desires and being able to describe actions as having complex intentions. This observation does not deprive the theory of interpretation of interest, but assigns it a place within a more comprehensive theory of action and thought.
>
> (*ITI*, p. 162)

Again, 'the attribution of beliefs and desires (and other thoughts) goes hand in hand with the interpretation of speech, [and] neither the theory of decision nor of interpretation can be successfully developed without the other' (*ITI*, p. 163). Thus, the concepts in the theory of interpretation include both linguistic and psychological concepts, and they are on a par in making sense of something as an agent. There is no more to belief or desire or preference than can be gleaned from behaviour, any more than there is in the case of meaning, on Davidson's view.[4]

Let us consider one final set of misunderstandings. Stoutland says (p. 593),

> Lepore and Ludwig argue that Davidson's view of the role of radical interpretation is inconsistent with 'our having access to our own mental states independent of our observing our behavior' (*DD*, p. 222).

What we argue is that Davidson needs to have a way of accounting for that fact consistent with his position on the character of the concepts of interpretation. Davidson agreed and aimed to meet the challenge, as is well known. We argue in the book, in chapter 20, that his own arguments for this are not successful. Stoutland says,

> Their argument assumes that Davidson regarded concepts of mental states as purely theoretical, an assumption I believe is false.
>
> (p. 593)

As we have just seen, though, Stoutland's belief is mistaken. In many central papers Davidson makes clear that he does regard all the concepts of the theory of interpretation as theoretical in the sense we have identified. Stoutland also says,

> It also assumes that 'the standpoint of interpretation [is] the sole standpoint from which to understand our beliefs, and other attitudes' (*DD*, p. 389), which is also false. Davidson did not assume that the interpretive standpoint was the *only* one from which to understand language and thought. Indeed, he regarded it as a necessary feature of language and thought that we have first-person authority about them, which means that we are in general right in what we take them to be, although not by interpreting them since the idea of interpreting our present selves is not intelligible.
>
> (p. 593)

It looks as if Stoutland is here saying that Davidson did not hold that the standpoint of the interpreter of another person is methodologically fundamental in understanding language and related concepts because Davidson held that we have what he called first-person authority with respect to what we believe. But to say we have first-person authority with respect to what we believe is not to say that the first-person standpoint is one from which we can understand the fundamental character of the concepts of the theory of interpretation. Far from it: for Davidson's explanation of first-person authority is a resolutely third-person explanation.

Stoutland also says that Davidson does not attempt to explain first-person authority; he says that the account is 'meant to illuminate the asymmetry but not to explain why it exists' (p. 593). We simply invite the reader to look at Davidson's paper 'First Person Authority'. It is abundantly clear that Davidson's goal in that paper is to answer the question 'Why should there be this asymmetry between attributions of attitudes to our present selves and attributions of the same attitudes to other selves?' (*SIO*, p. 3). He says of this paper, in a later essay, 'There I argued that attention to how we attribute thoughts and meanings to others would explain first person authority' (*SIO*, p. 17).

As further evidence that Davidson did not hold the third-person point of view to be the fundamental standpoint for understanding the concepts of the theory of interpretation, Stoutland quotes Davidson on the interconnection between knowledge of the world, other minds, and our own minds (p. 594):

> If I did not know what others think, I would have no thoughts of my own and so would not know what I think. If I did not know what I think, I would lack the ability to gauge the thoughts of others. Gauging the thoughts of others requires that I live in the same world with them, sharing many reactions to its major features, including its values. So there is no danger that in viewing the world objectively we will lose touch with ourselves. The three sorts of knowledge form a tripod: if any leg were lost, no part would stand (*SIO*, p. 220).

However, this does not bear on which standpoint is basic to understanding linguistic and psychological concepts. It bears only on whether we could have knowledge of any fact about the world, our own minds, or the minds of others, without knowledge of facts about the other two. Davidson's method for showing that these three sorts of knowledge are interconnected, though, goes through the standpoint of the radical interpreter. As Davidson says, right before this passage, 'If I am right, our propositional knowledge has its basis not in the impersonal but in the interpersonal' (*SIO*, p. 219).

IV

Stoutland sees our book as part of

> a struggle … shaping up between those who see [Davidson's] work as continuing a certain tradition of analytical philosophy and those who see it as going beyond that tradition in decisively new ways. Lepore and Ludwig's book is of the first kind [*sic*]; it amounts to a passionate and opinionated defence of the view that Davidson's work is squarely in the tradition of analytical philosophy as they understand it.
>
> (p. 594)

He goes on to say, '[a]nalytical philosophy is no longer a well-defined school, but Lepore and Ludwig show their allegiance to one version of it, best exemplified in the work of John Searle and Jerry Fodor' (p. 594). Analytic philosophy has not been a well-defined school, if that means that those thought of as analytic philosophers share a unified set of doctrines, since at least the first decade of the twentieth century. Yet Stoutland still sees it, or versions of it, as defined by some set of doctrines its adherents pay allegiance too. This is historically inaccurate. Putting aside the puzzle of what set of doctrines John Searle and Jerry Fodor are supposed to share,[5] analytic philosophy is not defined by a set of doctrines. Its unity as a tradition is determined largely by new generations of philosophers in the tradition being trained in philosophy through the study of a shifting canon of works selected from that tradition stretching back to those of Frege, Russell, and Moore, and by an emphasis on clarity and rigour of argumentation and attention to detail in philosophy. Our book is not a defence, opinionated or not, of the view that Davidson's work is squarely in the tradition of analytic philosophy. That Davidson's work is squarely in the tradition of analytic philosophy is not something that calls for a defence. Those who think something else have succumbed to a myth about what the tradition of analytic philosophy is, thinking that the rejection of one or another doctrine is a rejection of analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophy is not that sort of thing.

Stoutland's view of Davidson comes out in the following synoptic passage:

> His arguments were seldom like those of traditional analytical philosophy: they were typically brief and sweeping, they were embedded in interpretations and hence often very circuitous, they frequently aimed less at proving a conclusion than at suggesting a strategy, getting across a point of view, or making plausible a new way of seeing things.
>
> (p. 594)

There is something in the idea that Davidson wanted us philosophers to see things in a new way, and that he had a strategy or programme which he recognized as incomplete. This is a hallmark of great philosophers, from Plato to Descartes, Kant, and Quine, among many others. But Davidson's papers are full of intricate, subtle, extended, detailed argumentation, negative and positive. They are paradigms of analytic philosophy. Colin McGinn wrote, on the publication of *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 'Davidson's work stands forth as a major contribution to analytical philosophy.' Sir Peter Strawson wrote, 'it must be said that this is one of the most impressive works of analytical philosophy to appear for a good many years'. To suggest that Davidson's claim to fame is that he did not try to give extended or detailed arguments for his views but merely suggested strategies or tried to get across a point of view or make plausible a new way of seeing things (an anti-Cartesian world-view) is to do him a great disservice.

We set out to try to give a clear view of Davidson's ambitious and transformative project, to trace its development, to explain its systematicity, to identify its fundamental assumptions, to trace connections between different parts of Davidson's work, to bring out its significance, and to evaluate it. This would not be a project worth undertaking if we did not regard Davidson as a philosopher of the first rank. While we have not agreed with all of Davidson's conclusions, we have benefited enormously from trying to think through his project and from challenging his arguments. We do not say in the book that it is the final word on these matters, but we do think that the way toward clarity requires careful attention to what assumptions underlie Davidson's project, what conclusions can be drawn from them, and what reasons can be given for them.

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Notes

1 Our note: Quine would never have put anything in this way. Behaviour is observable. Observations of behaviour form the evidential basis for confirming a translation manual for another speaker.

2 If something is possible, and the modality we are dealing has an S5 modal logic, then it *must* be possible as well. Of course, there may be ways of construing the sentence that removes this difficulty, but this shows that there are considerable interpretive difficulties in understanding what Davidson intends here.

3 Davidson does, of course, think that psychological concepts are importantly different from the concepts of physics, as their attributions are governed by norms of rationality, while attributions of physical concepts are not. 'Nothing in physics corresponds to the way in which this feature of the mental shapes its categories' (*POR*, p. 121). But he also thinks of them as descriptive and rejects the 'the old positivist distinction between "the descriptive vocabulary of intentionality" and the "prescriptive vocabulary of normativity"' (*TLH*, p. 320). As

Davidson says, 'The point of concepts is to classify things, and concepts survive only if they are found useful. "Useful" here means leading to valuable generalizations. I have myself urged that the generalizations mental concepts lend themselves to are less strict than those physics aims for, but they are ones we could not live without' (*TLH*, p. 320).

4 We don't want to make too much of this, but of course both of us knew Davidson personally. Our contact with his work and his views is not just through his written work. Lepore's long association with Davidson is well known. Ludwig was a student of Davidson's at Berkeley. Davidson read with approval Ludwig's introduction to the Cambridge University Press volume on him in the Contemporary Philosophy in Focus series (*D* in the reference list), in which this basic account of his project is presented. He offered only a few minor corrections on historical matters.

5 The doctrines that Stoutland lists right after mentioning Searle and Fodor are not doctrines that they share.

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