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# ON DAVIDSON'S REFUTATION OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES AND CONCEPTUAL RELATIVISM

BY

XINLI WANG

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**Abstract:** Despite Donald Davidson's influential criticism of the *very notion* of conceptual schemes, the notion continues enjoying its popularity in contemporary philosophy and, accordingly, conceptual relativism is still very much alive. There is one major reason responsible for Davidson's failure which has not been widely recognized: What Davidson attacks fiercely is not the *very notion*, but *a notion* of conceptual schemes, namely, the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes and its underlying Kantian scheme-content dualism. However, such a notion simply cannot carry the weight of conceptual relativism for it does not catch the essences of conceptual relativism. Consequently, I argue that the *very notion* of conceptual schemes and conceptual relativism have survived Davidson's attack. Therefore, the failure of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes and Kantian scheme-content dualism, even if Davidson can claim victory, does not mark the end of the *very notion* of conceptual schemes.

## 1. *Why a revisit?*

Donald Davidson's seminal paper 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' (1974)<sup>1</sup> has been heavily discussed and debated from both sides in the literature – the detractors and the defenders of the notion of conceptual schemes and the doctrine of conceptual relativism – for over thirty years. Davidson's arguments are designed primarily to refute the doctrine of conceptual relativism. He assumes that the doctrine of conceptual

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relativism presupposes the idea of *alternative* conceptual schemes, so the refutation of the latter is, thereby, the refutation of the former. The defenders of conceptual schemes and the friends of conceptual relativism<sup>2</sup> have launched numerous counter attacks on Davidson's assault on conceptual schemes and conceptual relativism, which mainly focus on two directions corresponding to the two essential aspects of any notion of conceptual schemes: the form of schemes – what sort of entities a scheme might be; and the sort of content – what kind of entities the content might be.<sup>3</sup>

On the scheme side, most defenders of conceptual schemes have been struggling to rescue the *very* notion of conceptual schemes attacked by Davidson, namely, the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes, by exploring flaws that are internal to Davidson's arguments.<sup>4</sup> For me, this is not an effective way to respond to Davidson's criticism since the notion of conceptual schemes that Davidson attacks is not the *very* notion of conceptual schemes, and certainly not the one to which many conceptual relativists commit.<sup>5</sup> Fighting on the territory chosen by your 'enemy' would not be a wise move, and it may turn out that the territory is not worth defending. Of course, I am certainly not the first one to realize such a pervasive conflation of the *very* notion of conceptual schemes and the Quinean notion. To the best of my knowledge, at least Ian Hacking (1982, 1983, 1992), Nicholas Rescher (1980), and Thomas Kuhn (1991, 1993) have, implicitly in one way or another, shown their dissatisfaction with Davidson's identification of the *very* notion of conceptual schemes with the Quinean notion; in fact, they have dismissed the Quinean notion. More recently, Michael Lynch (1998) explicitly associates the notion of conceptual schemes that Davidson attacks with 'the Quinean model,' and contends that the latter is 'not in the end a happy one' and is therefore not worth fighting for. However, since Hacking, Rescher, and Lynch mostly focus on developing a model of conceptual schemes as an alternative to the Quinean model, they did not dig down into the conceptual soil of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes; it leaves one wondering whether the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes is still a viable alternative. This is what I intend to accomplish here: to argue why the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes should be abandoned by unearthing its two basic unwanted assumptions that play directly into Davidson's hands, that is, the identification of conceptual schemes with sentential languages<sup>6</sup> and the thesis of redistribution of truth-values across different conceptual schemes. I will further show that dismantlement of those two assumptions will undermine one of the two lines of Davidson's attack on the *very* notion of conceptual schemes, i.e. the argument from the verifiability of alternative conceptual schemes.

On the content side, Davidson tries to remove the *very* conceptual foundation of any viable notion of conceptual schemes – *any form* of

scheme-content dualism – by reducing scheme-content dualism to the Kantian scheme-content dualism, the so-called third dogma of empiricism. Unfortunately, most defenders of conceptual schemes either are over-obsessed with Davidson's arguments from the verifiability of alternative conceptual schemes or tend to confuse, or even intentionally reduce, Davidson's attack on scheme-content dualism (the content side) with his argument from the verifiability of alternative conceptual schemes (the scheme side)<sup>7</sup> so as not to pay enough attention to Davidson's second line of attack.<sup>8</sup> However, Davidson's attack on scheme-content dualism is, in my opinion, more lethal and detrimental to the very notion of conceptual schemes. We have to take the challenge head on. I will argue that Davidson's attack on the third dogma could be stopped if we can work out a workable non-Kantian scheme-content dualism.

It turns out that what Davidson attacks fiercely is not the *very notion*, but *a notion* of conceptual schemes, namely, the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes and its underlying Kantian scheme-content dualism. However, such a notion simply cannot carry the weight of conceptual relativism for it does not catch the essences of conceptual relativism. Consequently, scheme-content dualism and the relativity of schemes, the two essential tenets of conceptual relativism, can survive Davidson's attack. Therefore, even if Davidson can claim victory, the failure of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes and its underlying Kantian scheme-content dualism does not mark the end of the very notion of conceptual schemes and the downfall of conceptual relativism.

## **2. Davidson's refutation of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes**

### 2.1. THE QUINEAN LINGUISTIC MODEL OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

A conceptual scheme, as a conceptual modality underlying our belief systems, is commonly considered to be a specific way of conceptualizing the world as we perceive it or a way of constructing our possible experience. Conceptual relativists contend further that there exist distinct conceptual schemes – either between two distinct intellectual/cultural traditions or over the course of history within the same intellectual/cultural tradition – with some substantial semantic and/or conceptual disparities between them. Those distinct conceptual schemes schematize our common experience in different ways and make meaning, truth, cross-language understanding and communication, and human perceptions of reality relative to conceptual schemes. Consequently, distinct conceptual schemes create serious impediments to cross-scheme understanding and often lead to communication breakdown between the respective believers. Radical

conceptual relativists contend that conceptual schemes can differ *massively* to the extent of being incommensurable and leading to complete communication breakdown. For modest conceptual relativists, on the other hand, even if radically distinct schemes without any significant overlap are hard to come by, partially distinct conceptual schemes with some shared common parts are pervasive, which often lead to partial communication breakdown. Behind those apparently metaphorical descriptions, we can identify two essential tenets of conceptual relativism on conceptual schemes as follows.

*Scheme-Content Dualism* There is a fundamental distinction between the world/experience on the one hand (the content) and schemes for conceptualizing them to form beliefs on the other (the scheme). A variety of widely recognizable scheme-content dualisms have been proposed so far: (a) The scheme could be [S1] a set of Neo-Kantian *posteriori* basic concepts, such as P. F. Strawson's contextual interconnected basic concepts<sup>9</sup> or [S2] a sentential language with its sentences accepted as true. (b) The content to be conceptualized by a scheme is either [W] the world/reality or [E] experience. (c) A scheme could function either as [R1: the organizing metaphor] a categorical framework to categorize its empirical content or as [R2: the fitting metaphor] a form of representation to fit (face, predict, and account for) its empirical content.

*The Relativity of Schemes* A sound scheme-content distinction and the existence of a conceptual scheme are necessary, but not sufficient for conceptual relativism. The Kantian built-in *a priori* schemes, for instance, do not allow the existence of *alternative* schemes. Even the existence of alternative conceptual schemes does not lead inexorably to conceptual relativism: Conceptual pluralism does not imply conceptual relativism since alternative conceptual schemes are possible even within a single language (Nevo, 2004). Nevertheless, the reverse is certainly true: Conceptual relativism does presuppose the existence of distinct alternative conceptual schemes.

As we can see above, the notion of conceptual schemes remains murky; widespread confusions linger over its meaning. Even so, a particular notion of conceptual schemes dominates the current discussion, that is, the Quinean linguistic model of conceptual schemes,<sup>10</sup> a model perpetuated and 'popularized,' ironically, by Davidson through his well-known criticism (Davidson, 1974). Based on this model, a conceptual scheme is [S] a set of intertranslatable sentential languages with [E1] uninterpreted sensory experiences or 'the given' as its empirical content. Such a language/scheme is supposed to either [R1] individuate, organize, and categorize its empirical content (such as posits, physical objects, forces, energy, etc.) in terms of its referential apparatus (such as predicates, quantifiers, and terms) or [R2] fit its empirical content via its descriptive apparatus (mainly, sentences held to be true by its speakers).<sup>11</sup>

Conceptual relativism, Davidson contends, threatens to break our cherished hope of cross-language/scheme understanding/communication. Instead of taking on different forms of conceptual relativism one by one, Davidson attempts to dig out its alleged root, i.e. the very notion of the Quinean conceptual schemes. Davidson's arguments against the Quinean notion are constructed along two distinct lines of reasoning: One focuses on the verifiability of alternative conceptual schemes; the other undermines its underlying Kantian schemes-content dualism. Let us briefly review those arguments below.

## 2.2. INVERIFIABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

It seems perfectly imaginable that there might be some intelligent creatures or cognitive beings whose minds operate within a largely different framework of concepts and an unfamiliar mode of thinking from ours such that their experience of the world could be substantially remote from our own. However, Davidson is not impressed at all with those thought experiments for a good reason: They cannot be verified semantically.

*Radical conceptual relativism and translatability* The identification of conceptual schemes with languages within the Quinean model prompts many conceptual relativists to consider cross-language translatability as a measurement of conceptual distance between two distinct schemes. Since lack of shared common parts between two radically distinct conceptual schemes makes cross-scheme translation impossible, complete untranslatability of one language into another becomes thereby a sufficient condition for radically distinct conceptual schemes; accordingly, translatability turns out to be a necessary condition for *the same* scheme. However, as Davidson quickly points out, the conceptual relativist belief that there are some distinct alien languages untranslatable into a known language simply does not make sense if translatability is a necessary criterion of languagehood: If we cannot translate an alien language at all, how can we even be able to recognize it as a language, not just noises?

Other conceptual relativists may rebut that the translatability criterion of languagehood is something posited externally, which conceptual relativists do not have to accept (Rescher, 1980). Davidson disagrees and contends that the criterion actually is implied by the Quinean scheme-content dualism. As Davidson observes, the dualism is associated with two popular metaphors, the organizing metaphor R1 and the fitting metaphor R2. R1 cannot be made intelligible after scrutiny. As to R2, to say that a scheme fits its empirical content is no more than saying that it is true of the content. Therefore, R2 can be reduced to the claim that something is an acceptable conceptual scheme for the interpreter if it is largely true from the interpreter's perspective. However, according to Davidson's truth-conditional theory of translation, to be true and to be translatable always

go hand in hand. If so, Quinean conceptual relativism slips right back to the translatability criterion of languagehood since R2 is ultimately explained in terms of translatability. Thus, to Quinean conceptual relativists, an alternative conceptual scheme different from our own becomes 'largely true but not translatable' (Davidson, 1974, pp. 193–4). Davidson concludes that the translatability criterion of both *alternative* schemes and *the same* scheme is ultimately incoherent.

A radical conceptual relativist can respond to Davidson on two fronts: either to defend the translatability criterion or to separate conceptual relativism from the Quinean relativism as Davidson construes it by removing the translatability criterion out of the equation. The first route is a well-worn path that I will not belabor here. The second route, for me, is more effective and will be discussed in detail in section 3.

*Modest conceptual relativism and interpretability* The basic supposition of modest conceptual relativism must be, Davidson contends, that the difference between two conceptual schemes can be identified by reference to the common part shared by both. The common part must represent shared concepts and beliefs, and the other parts will be presumed to constitute the difference between meanings or concepts, not just difference in beliefs. Since those unshared parts are not translatable, we can only hope to discover the difference in meanings and concepts through radical interpretation. Thus, the criterion of alternative partially distinct conceptual schemes turns out to be that an alien conceptual scheme is different from the interpreter's when she can identify the difference in meanings or concepts in terms of radical interpretation. Obviously, this interpretability criterion assumes that the interpreter could decisively separate the speaker's concepts from his beliefs and determine whether, when the speaker thinks and speaks differently from the interpreter, the difference lies in his concepts rather than his beliefs. But the assumption is, Davidson argues, not justified given the underlying methodology of radical interpretation, i.e. the principle of charity.

A central source of trouble in interpreting others in the case of radical interpretation is that there is no way to completely disentangle what an alien means from what he believes. To break into such a vicious circle of radical interpretation, Davidson suggests that we should fix beliefs constant as far as possible while solving for meaning. Among the beliefs ascertainable by observation prior to interpretation are notably the speaker's attitudes or beliefs of holding-true certain sentences through consent when the sentences are actually true according to the interpreter's truth conditions. Such holding-true conditions are, for Davidson, the only legitimate evidential basis for radical interpretation. Therefore, radical interpretation can only be accomplished through the interpreter ascribing to the speaker's beliefs as *largely true* by the interpreter's own lights. If so, nothing can force us to allocate a difference in respect of holding a sen-

tence true to a disagreement in beliefs, rather than to a disagreement in concepts. It is always possible to conclude, through a variety of semantic maneuvers, that the others share our scheme but have different beliefs than ours. Therefore, as with the translatability criterion, the interpretability criterion fails to verify the existence of alternative conceptual schemes.

Typical responses to Davidson's above argument focus on its shaky foundation, namely, the principle of charity. I agree with those critics that the principle of charity is untenable, theoretically flawed, and practically unproductive. But my interest here is not in the principle of charity in general, but in Davidson's truth-conditional interpretation of the principle, which will be discussed in section 3.

### 2.3. CHALLENGE TO THE KANTIAN SCHEME-CONTENT DUALISM: THE THIRD DOGMA OF EMPIRICISM

A conceptual scheme can make sense only if there is some content to schematize. What kind of empirical content is a scheme supposed to process? Since scheme-content dualism originates from Kant's 'given-interpretation' distinction – the existence of some unschematized neutral raw materials on the one hand and our mental schemes to 'interpret' them into possible conscious experience on the other – Davidson is convinced that such a sharp Kantian scheme-content distinction must be the foundation of any workable scheme-content dualism. Therefore, for Davidson, the empirical contents of a conceptual scheme have to be either [E1] 'the sensuous given' or [W1] the world-as-it-is – i.e. the experience or the world outside of any possible conceptualization that is unnamable, unspecifiable, and thereby ungraspable physical thrust of stimuli or neutral materials. These two possible empirical contents, Davidson argues, constitute the core of the Kantian scheme-content dualism underlying the Quinean model of conceptual schemes. Dismantlement of the Kantian scheme-content dualism would render any form of conceptual schemes baseless (Davidson, 1974, p. 192; 1983, pp. 140–44; 1989, p. 41).

Davidson argues that the Kantian scheme-content dualism, which he calls 'the third dogma of empiricism,' is actually one more instance of various harmful dualisms. Such a dogma is harmful because it imposes some epistemological intermediaries, no matter whether they are sense data / the given to be organized or schemes doing the organizing, between the mind and the world. However, Davidson finds that those imposed intermediaries are epistemologically impotent since they simply do not play any epistemological role in either determining or justifying the content of our beliefs about the world. In addition, instead of finding any solace for our epistemological anxieties about the relationship between the mind and the world, introducing those intermediate entities into the causal chain can only create a gap between the mind and the world that prevents

us from holding directly onto the world. Consequently, 'idealism, reductionist forms of empiricism, and skepticism loom' (Davidson, 1989, p. 43). Therefore, it is a dogma that we had better get rid of.

### 3. *On the charge of inverifiability*

The best way to rebut Davidson's criticism of the very notion of conceptual schemes is to realize that what Davidson targets is a special notion of conceptual schemes, i.e. the Quinean linguistic model of conceptual schemes with the Kantian scheme-content dualism as its foundation. It is exactly due to such a Quinean interpretation of conceptual schemes that the very notion of conceptual schemes falls a prey to Davidson's criticism. More precisely, there are two basic assumptions behind the Quinean model that play into Davidson's hands: the identification of conceptual schemes with sentential languages and the redistribution of truth-values across conceptual schemes. Let us analyze each one in turn.

#### 3.1. CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES AS SENTENTIAL LANGUAGES

Presumably, conceptual schemes are about concepts. However, the notion of 'concept' is notoriously murky and slippery. Since concepts are associated with meanings and meanings are linked with languages, thinking in terms of languages can certainly help us better grasp concepts, better detect conceptual variation, and better measure conceptual distance between alternative conceptual schemes. This is why ever since 'the linguistic turn,' conceptual schemes have thus commonly come to be associated with languages.

If concepts were linked to meanings, then the primary linguistic vehicle of meaning would be a conceptual scheme. Based on Quine's holistic semantics, the unit of linguistic meaning with empirical significance is neither a term nor a sentence, but a language as a whole. Accordingly, a conceptual scheme, Quine contends, is not merely associated with language, but is rather *identical* with it. Quine, in his reply to Davidson's criticism, explicitly treats conceptual scheme as language: 'Where I have spoken of a conceptual scheme I could have spoken of a language. Where I have spoken of a very alien conceptual scheme I would have been content, Davidson will be glad to know, to speak of a language awkward or baffling to translate' (Quine, 1981, p. 41). Considering that not all languages are conceptually distinct, a conceptual scheme actually becomes, for the Quinean, a set of languages sharing the same conceptual makeup, whatever it may be. Furthermore, for a language to face reality, most of its sentences have to be true, at least from the speaker's perspec-



tive. Therefore, a conceptual scheme, to the Quinean, eventually becomes identical with a sentential language with its sentences held to be true.

One may wonder whether we have done some injustice to Quine when I take Quine to treat a conceptual scheme as a language and to treat a language as a set of sentences held true. For Quine, what faces experience is a language as a whole, not individual sentences held to be true. Besides, Quine does say a few additional things about conceptual scheme difference, which he at least sometimes treats as a matter of degree rather than a dichotomy. Please bear in mind that we are talking about the Quinean model, not necessarily Quine's positions as such (see note 11). I am more interested in Davidson's reading of Quine on the subject since the very notion of the conceptual schemes under attack is the Quinean notion construed and popularized through Davidson's criticism. Davidson actually urges us to 'identify conceptual schemes with languages, then, or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages' (Davidson, 1974, p. 185).

While it is widely accepted that conceptual schemes are and should be somehow associated with languages, it is not clear at all as to how the association should be born out. For Quine and many others, conceptual schemes and languages are identical. But whether a conceptual scheme should be identical with a language depends on the kind of language. We are told by Quine that a conceptual scheme is not a language in a special technical sense, such as formal symbolic language, but rather an 'ordinary language, serving no technical function' (Quine, 1981, p. 41). Among the advocates of conceptual relativism identified by Davidson, Benjamin Whorf (1956), besides Quine, exclusively focuses on natural (spoken) languages, i.e. languages that could be approached empirically. Besides natural languages, Davidson identifies another kind of languages widely discussed among conceptual relativists such as Kuhn and Feyerabend, namely, scientific languages, i.e. formally constructed theoretical languages with specific syntax and lexicon. More specifically, we can link scientific language with scientific theory based on a modified 'semantic' approach of Beth and van Fraassen's (van Fraassen, 1970) that takes a scientific theory as a set of theoretical definitions plus a number of theoretical hypotheses. Contrary to the syntactic approach, which identifies a theory with a definite set of statements, scientific theories are, according to the semantic approach, not linguistic entities, but rather some extra-linguistic structures standing in mapping relations to the world. If so, a scientific theory has to be formulated in some formal theoretical language with a specific lexicon plus syntax and logic, which consists of a consistent *set of sentences* while the theory formulated in the language is either these sentences marked as 'believed,' or a distribution of degrees of beliefs, in Bayesian style, over the sentences. So defined, a scientific language is the

sentential theoretical language employed by a scientific theory. In his criticism, Davidson treats both natural languages and scientific languages as sentential languages held to be true by their speakers without further distinction (Davidson, 1974).

However, neither natural languages *per se* nor scientific languages construed as sentential languages can be identical with conceptual schemes. A natural language *per se* such as English or Chinese is in no sense a conceptual scheme. Does any conceptual relativist really seriously think that all Chinese would inherit a unique conceptual scheme different from the scheme that all English speakers are supposed to possess simply because they speak different natural languages? A natural language is not a theory. A natural language like Chinese or English does not schematize experience, nor even metonymically predicts, fits, or faces reality. Although part of a natural language, i.e. its grammar, does in some sense determine the logical space of possibilities (Whorf, 1956), it is the theoretical assertions made in the language that predict and describe reality and in so doing assert that which logical spaces are occupied in the world. Furthermore, a natural language is not even a totality of beliefs. It is absurd to assume that people who speak the same natural language would have the same belief system.

Could a conceptual scheme be identical with a scientific language? Although a scientific language is more closely related to a conceptual scheme than a natural language is, a scientific language construed as a *sentential* language is not a conceptual scheme either. First, many parts of a conceptual scheme, such as a categorical framework (usually a lexical structure of a scientific theory), are simply not a set of sentences or beliefs. Second, a conceptual scheme that serves as the conceptual framework of a theory cannot in itself be the theory or the language expressing the theory. Third, it would not improve matters to stipulate that a conceptual scheme is the totality of sentences held to be true by its speaker or the believer's total belief system. A conceptual scheme is not supposed to be what we believe, what we experience, or what we perceive from the world, but rather what *shapes* our beliefs, what *schematizes* our experience (even what *makes* our experience possible), or what *determines* the way in which we perceive the world. Schemes are something 'forced on' us conceptually, something we commit tacitly as fundamental presuppositions of our common experience or beliefs. Besides, a conceptual scheme does not describe reality as the Quinean fitting model R2 suggests; it is rather the theory a scheme formulates that describes reality. A conceptual scheme can only 'confront' reality in a very loose sense, namely, by coming in touch with reality in terms of a theory. Accordingly, a conceptual scheme cannot be said to be true or largely true. Only the assertions made in a language and a theory couched in the language can be true or largely true.

Fourth, to treat a conceptual scheme as a sentential language is to confuse a language with a language scheme, i.e. the conceptual core of a language. When Whorf compares a natural language to a scientific theory, he actually means that the grammar of a natural language functions just like a scientific taxonomy. Grammar or taxonomy fixes the logical space of possibilities that the world may or may not occupy, in as much as grammar determines what it makes sense to say. Any sentences couched in the language with that grammar or taxonomy will have truth-values, and they are true or false depending upon whether things are as they asserted to be. It is exactly the role of Kuhn's notion of lexical structure in a scientific theory. Similarly, for Carnap (1956), a linguistic framework is not a language, but mainly refers to the meaning postulates of a scientific language. We can call those different conceptual apparatus of a theoretical language the language scheme. The language scheme of a scientific language is the conceptual scheme of the corresponding theory.

### 3.2. REDISTRIBUTION OF TRUTH-VALUES CROSS ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

Based on Davidson's reading of Quine and other conceptual relativists, if conceptual relativism is right that sentences are true only relative to their own language, then the language must contribute a distinct truth-scheme to determine the truth-values of its sentences, the truth-scheme that a competing alternative language does not share. 'Understood linguistically, a conceptual scheme would be the total linguistic contribution to doxastic and sentential truth. Empirical content would be the total contribution to doxastic and sentential truth – the total *extralinguistic* contribution to such truth' (Goldberg, 2004, p. 2). Construed as such, a Quinean conceptual scheme becomes, for Davidson, a sentential language with its sentences held to be true for its speaker.

If a conceptual scheme were identical with a sentential language, construed as the totality of sentences held to be true by its speaker, then it would seem natural to measure the conceptual distance between two distinct schemes in terms of the truth-values of their sentences. This is exactly the strategy used by Davidson in his arguments against the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes from verifiability. Recall that Davidson reduces the Quinean fitting metaphor R2 to a truth criterion of languagehood: A form of activity represents the use of a language for an interpreter if and only if it is *largely true* from the interpreter's perspective. Accordingly, Davidson derives a truth criterion of Quinean alternative conceptual schemes: 'We get a new out of an old scheme when the speakers of a language come to accept as true an important range of sentences they previously took to be false (and, of course, vice versa)' (Davidson, 1974, p. 188). In other words, the conceptual difference between two competing

schemes/languages can be semantically measured by redistribution of *truth-values* over their sentences: Two schemes/languages differ when some substantial sentences of one language are not held to be true in the other in a systematic manner.

Quine seems to think along the same line in terms of his holistic picture of scientific development. For Quine, a scientific theory is like a field of force with experience as its boundary conditions, and the total field is underdetermined by the totality of all possible experience. A new theory could emerge from an old one by making sufficient adjustments in the interior of the field. After readjustments ‘truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements’ (1951, p. 42). It is conceivable that if an old theory were under a radical readjustment to the extent that truth-values over sentences had to be redistributed in a systematic manner, then the new theory that emerges would be radically distinct from the old one. In this case, Quine would claim that two theories embody two different conceptual schemes.

We can dig deeper into a tacit assumption behind the above truth-value criterion of Quinean alternative conceptual schemes. Redistribution of truth-values over the sentences between two competing languages presupposes that although the speaker and the interpreter in discourse may assign opposite truth-values to many sentences of the other’s language, they agree that those sentences of the other language are either true or false:

(QT) Most sentences of the speaker’s language are either true or false from the point of view of the interpreter’s language no matter how disparate the two languages are.

Consequently, the possibility of the occurrence of a truth-value gap<sup>12</sup> between two languages is excluded *a priori*.

My major reservation with the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes is not just about many theoretical difficulties it faces, but rather with its basic assumption QT; for it does not square with observations of many celebrated conceptual confrontations between opposing conceptual schemes revealed in the history of natural sciences and cultural studies, especially those under the name of incommensurability. Examples include: Ptolemaic astronomy versus Copernican astronomy; Newtonian mechanics versus Einsteinian relativistic mechanics; Lavoisier’s oxygen theory versus Priestley’s phlogiston theory of combustion; Galenic medical theory versus Pasteurian medical theory; and so on. These familiar conceptual confrontations are, to me, not confrontations between two conceptual schemes with different distributions of truth-values over their assertions, but rather confrontations between two scientific languages with different distributions of truth-value status<sup>13</sup> over their sentences due to incompatible metaphysical presuppositions. The advocate of an alien conceptual

scheme not only does not hold the same notion of truth as ours, but also does not agree with us on the truth-value status of the sentences in question. These scheme innovations, in the end, turn not on differences in truth-values (different *truth*-schemes), but on whether or not the sentences in the alternative conceptual scheme have truth-values (different *truth-value* schemes).

Western medical theory (WMT) and traditional Chinese medical theory (CMT) provide us with such a good example. Embedded within two distinct cultural and intellectual traditions, the two medical communities experience their surrounding worlds substantially differently, and describe and interpret their own experience in terms of disparate conceptual mechanisms – different medical concepts, disjointed medical categorical systems, distinct modes of reasoning and rational justification, different internal standards of truth-value status, and different ways of conceptualizing facts (what counts as presumptive facts). Consequently, these disparate conceptual mechanisms are bound up with different worldviews in such a way as to make intellectual contact with one another difficult.

Imagine that a Chinese physician diagnoses a patient's painful spleen as being due to an excess of yin within his spleen (an asthenic spleen) and claims that

(P) An excess of yin within a person's spleen causes a painful spleen,

based on a fundamental principle of CMT that all diseases are due to the loss of a balance between the yin part and the yang part of the human body. What is a likely response of the practitioner of WMT? She would certainly not claim that the Chinese's assertion is false. The content of *P* lies outside the Westerner's conceptual reach because she could not appreciate the way in which the assertion is proposed and justified. It is not even clear to her whether the sentence really asserts anything. It is, hence, very likely that she would say something like, 'What is the point of the Chinese's saying?' The Westerner's response implies that the issue of whether the assertion is true or false simply does not arise.

A similar analysis can be extended to other core sentences of the language of CMT. There is no way to match what the Chinese physician wants to say against anything the Western physician wants to say at the theoretical level. They do not lie in the sphere of *disagreement or conflict* of the sort arising when one theory holds something to be true that the other holds to be false. The difference between them is not that Western medical theory has a different theory of the operation of the yin and the yang from that of its Chinese counterpart, or that the Chinese physician says different things about bacteria and viruses. Rather, the difference lies in the fact that one side has nothing to say about what is claimed by the other side. It is not that they say *the same thing* differently, but rather that they say

totally *different things*. The key contrast here is between saying something (asserting or denying) and saying nothing. The Western physician can neither assert nor deny what is claimed by the Chinese physician. Consequently, the Western physician does not regard as false many core sentences of the language of CMT; she simply cannot assign truth-values to them. There is a truth-value gap between the two languages.

The above observation applies to other competing conceptual schemes. Hacking (1983, p. 70) notes that when we find that the medical theory of Paracelsus makes little sense to us, 'the trouble is not that we think Paracelsus wrote falsely, but that we cannot attach truth or falsehood to a great many of his sentences' because we cannot comprehend the Renaissance mode of reasoning underlying the Paracelsan language. Similarly, Kuhn (1993) observes that when a modern reader finds many Aristotelian sentences difficult to understand, the trouble is not that the reader thinks Aristotle wrote *falsely*, but that he or she cannot attach *truth or falsity* to a great many of the Aristotelian sentences since the Aristotelian lexical taxonomy presupposed by the sentences is totally alien to him or her.

To sum up, it is the two basic assumptions of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes – that is, the identification of conceptual schemes with sentential languages and the redistribution of truth-values across different conceptual schemes – that fall a prey to Davidson's attack. The identification of conceptual schemes with sentential languages prompts Davidson to focus on sentential truth and sentential translation in distinguishing alternative conceptual schemes. The combination of the two assumptions validates Davidson's thinking of conceptual schemes in terms of meanings/concepts and translation/interpretation in Tarski's truth-conditional style, and thus sets foundation for Davidson's truth-conditional theory of translation and his truth-conditional interpretation of the charity principle.

The removal of those two assumptions of the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes would effectively sidetrack Davidson's two verificationist arguments. Sentential language translatability can no longer be used as a criterion of the identity of conceptual schemes. An alien conceptual scheme cannot be regarded as a set of sentences taken to be 'largely true' to 'fit' its empirical content. Consequently, the fitting metaphor R2 could not be reduced to the claim that a conceptual scheme different from the interpreter's is largely true. In fact, the core sentences of an alien conceptual scheme have no truth-values when considered from the viewpoint of a competing scheme. Thus, Davidson cannot derive mutual translatability between two distinct schemes/languages from holding true since there are no shared truths between two conceptual schemes to begin with. Davidson's argument from translatability against radical conceptual relativism looses its teeth. As to Davidson's argument from interpretability against modest conceptual relativism, it cannot be sustained as long as we have

removed its theoretical foundation, namely, the truth-conditional interpretation of the charity principle, which depends upon again the shared holding-true between two conceptual schemes.

#### 4. *On the charge of the third dogma of empiricism*

The very notion of conceptual schemes still faces a more serious challenge from Davidson, namely, his criticism of the Kantian scheme-content dualism. I agree wholeheartedly that some *sort of* scheme-content dualism should be the backbone of any viable notion of conceptual schemes and any coherent form of conceptual relativism. However, why does it have to be the Kantian scheme-content dualism? Let me make it clear upfront that I have no intention of defending the Kantian scheme-content dualism. It is only too clear today that the notion of the pre-schematic empirical content is indeed objectionable. Of course, Davidson has a much bigger fish to fry than the Kantian scheme-content dualism; he wants to undermine conceptual relativism by removing its foundation, namely, *any form* of scheme-content dualism. To claim a victory, Davidson has to show us that *any attempt* to disjoin a scheme from its content is doomed to failure. In other words, Davidson needs to convince us that no scheme-content distinction of a certain sort can be drawn, which is innocent enough to be immune from the charge of the third dogma of empiricism, but is solid enough to supply a foundation for conceptual relativism. Davidson has not done so. In fact, following the suggestions from John McDowell (1994) and Maria Baghramian (1998), I believe there is at least one kind of *non-Kantian* scheme-content dualism that can sustain conceptual relativism.

##### 4.1. THE COMMON-SENSE EXPERIENCE

Are there other kinds of empirical contents, neither E1 nor W1, available for a non-Kantian scheme-content dualism under consideration? How about our common-sense experience or the world as it is experienced by us? Begin with experience. Sense data such as a patch of color, an indescribable sound, or a fleeting sensation are not our lived experience like the perception of a yellow ball, loud music, or a feeling of love. Sense data are what William James (1909, p. 68) and C. I. Lewis (1929, p. 30) called 'thin experience of immediate sensation,' while our lived experiences are so-called 'the thick experience of everyday life,' such as our reflection of happiness and sadness and our perceptions of trees, rivers, and other people, etc. Davidson never seriously entertains the possibility of thick experience as the empirical content of a scheme. He always speaks of

‘experience’ in the sense of ‘thin experience.’ Even when he does mention experience with plurality, which is thick experience by nature – ‘events like losing a button or stubbing a toe’ – he dismisses it right away by reducing it to thin experience (Davidson, 1974, p. 192).

However, Davidson does touch, I think, the notion of thick experience under a different name, i.e. the world as it is experienced by us. By challenging the Kantian scheme-content dualism, Davidson’s wants to ‘restore the unmediated touch’ with the world, not the Kantian world-as-it-is, but the world full of the familiar objects like trees, tables, people, rocks, and ‘knives and forks, railroads and mountains, cabbages and kingdoms.’ In this sense, Davidson’s notion of the world is much like the pragmatist notion of ‘funded experience’ – ‘those beliefs which are not at the moment being challenged, because they present no problems and no one has bothered to think of alternatives to them’ (Rorty, 1972, p. 13). As Richard Rorty (1972) notes, Davidson seems to perform the conjuring trick of substituting the notion of ‘the unquestioned vast majority of our beliefs’ for ‘the notion of the world.’ Since the vast majority of our common beliefs must be true (the charity principle), the vast majority of the objects that our common beliefs are about must also exist. It turns out that we can start with ‘the unquestioned vast majority of our beliefs,’ which is just ‘our funded experience’ or ‘thick experience,’ but end with the world as it is experienced by us. For this reason, I will place both ‘thick experience’ and ‘the world as it is experienced by us’ under one roof as (E2) our common-sense experience or (W2) our common-sense world, the world that the unquestioned vast majority of our beliefs are thought to be about.

Could E2/W2 be the empirical content of a non-Kantian scheme-content dualism that we are proposing? It is certainly innocent enough to rebut Davidson’s charge of the third dogma of empiricism. Since the world we experience is the empirical content that our conceptual schemes process, there is not any unconceptualized ‘given’ as epistemological intermediary inserted between our world and us. Obviously, such a dualism does not prevent us from having direct contact with the world. The remaining question is whether E2/W2 is too ‘innocent’ to qualify as a proper empirical content of scheme-content dualism. Based on his reading of the upshot of Davidson’s arguments against the third dogma of empiricism, Rorty thinks so:

The notion of ‘the world’ as used in a phrase like ‘different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently’ must be the notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable – the thing-in-itself. In fact, as soon as we start thinking of ‘the world’ as atoms and the void, or sense data and awareness of them, or ‘stimuli’ of a certain sort brought to bear upon organs of a certain sort, we have changed the name of the game. For we are now well within some particular theory about how the world is. (Rorty, 1972, p. 14)



To fully understand Davidson's and Rorty's rejection of E2/W2 as a possible content of scheme-content dualism, we need to unearth one basic assumption that they associate with the dualism. Conceptual relativism apparently presupposes some sort of commonality underlying *competing* schemes: If there are *many* competing alternative conceptual schemes, there must be *one* common element for them to conceptualize. I do not think this commonality requirement of conceptual relativism is objectionable as long as it is modest. What is controversial is how to explain it. Does 'to be common' mean 'to be neutral to any schemes or be free of any interpretations or conceptualizations'? Davidson thinks so; to him, for the notion of alternative conceptual schemes to make sense at all, there has to be some common element shared by all possible conceptual schemes, and such a common element has to be 'something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes. . . . The neutral content waiting to be organized is supplied by nature . . .' (Davidson, 1974, pp. 190–91). This is Davidson's basic assumption of scheme-content dualism:

- (K) The empirical content of scheme-content dualism must be neutral to and beyond all schemes, theories, languages, and ideologies, and not contaminated by any concepts or interpretations.

Furthermore, if the content as 'the scheme-neutral input' or 'the theory-neutral reality' is 'untouched by conceptual interpretation,' then it logically follows that the scheme-content distinction has to be fixed and sharp; not any overlapping or intertwine between scheme and content is possible. It has become a common wisdom since Kant that there cannot be any purely unconceptualized content to our experience. Despite the decline of Kant's transcendental philosophy, the Kantian doctrine of concept-ladenness of experience is still very much alive today. This is why Davidson insists that E2/W2 cannot be the content of scheme-content dualism since it is not neutral and universal to all concepts and theories. For Rorty, when conceptual relativists introduce E2/W2 into the scene, the rules of 'the game' set up by K 'are violated' (Rorty, 1972, p. 14).

Davidson apparently attempts to present a dilemma to conceptual relativism: To make sense of scheme-content dualism, we need to clarify its empirical content, which is either concept-neutral (as with E1/W1) or concept-laden (as with E2/W2). If it is the former, it is a harmful metaphysical myth or a third dogma of empiricism; if it is the latter, it does not qualify as the content required by scheme-content dualism.

Conceptual relativism's response is simply this: Conceptual relativists would face such an inescapable dilemma *only if* they accepted the assumption K. But conceptual relativists clearly do not have to take the bait. The assumption K is indeed essential for the Kantian scheme-content dualism; but it is by no means essential for a non-Kantian scheme-content dualism.

Conceptual relativists can abandon entirely the myth of concept-neutral content without giving up scheme-content dualism. On the contrary, it is exactly due to the abandonment of the concept-neutral content and the denial of a fixed and absolute scheme-content distinction that turns Kantian conceptual absolutism upside down and thus makes conceptual relativism possible.

#### 4.2. A NON-KANTIAN SCHEME-CONTENT DUALISM

If there is no pre-schematic 'given' for any conceptual scheme to process, what is the empirical content of our schemes? I have suggested, following many others, that it is our common-sense experience. However, after rejecting the assumption K and its logical corollary, i.e. the rigid, fixed scheme-content distinction, conceptual relativism still faces two unanswered questions. First, if there is no scheme-neutral content and fixed scheme-content distinction, how can we meaningfully separate a scheme from its empirical content if we still want to make sense of the scheme-content distinction at all? Second, how can two competing schemes share a common empirical content if the content itself could be the very making of the schemes involved?

To address those concerns, we need to work out a non-fixed, relative scheme-content distinction. For this purpose, we had better consider the scheme-content distinction along with another closely related distinction, the analytic-synthetic distinction. Imagine that a scheme functions as a conceptual filter (a thought processor) between the world/experience (the empirical content of a scheme, the input) and the beliefs/thoughts (the cognitive content of a scheme, the output) in the way that a scheme organizes its *empirical content* to form its *cognitive content*. The scheme-content distinction is epistemic by nature, namely, the distinction between our conceptual apparatus and the world/experience. However, it is very tempting to confuse the distinction with a closely related semantic distinction, i.e. the analytic-synthetic distinction between sentences being true in virtue of their meanings/concepts involved alone and sentences being true in virtue of both their meanings/concepts and their empirical content.<sup>14</sup> Although Davidson realizes correctly that scheme-content dualism could well survive after the fall of the analytic-synthetic distinction, he is wrong to allege, 'giving up the analytic-synthetic distinction has not proven a help in making sense of conceptual relativism' (1974, p. 189). On the contrary, it is exactly due to the denial of a fixed, absolute analytic-synthetic distinction that makes alternative conceptual schemes possible. Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction (Quine, 1951) leads to abandoning the rigid distinction between concept, meaning, or language on the one hand and belief, thought, or theory on the other. It is no longer a novel idea today that all concepts themselves are empirical and none *a priori*;

concepts we deploy upon experience are themselves the products of empirical inquires. In other words, concepts are theory-laden, fact committal, and change with theories. Accordingly, conceptual schemes change and evolve with corresponding theories. Thus, the Kantian absolute conceptual scheme gives away to relative, alternative conceptual schemes.

However, even if scheme-content dualism neither necessitates nor presupposes the analytic-synthetic distinction, a total abandonment of all forms of the analytic-synthetic distinction would render the very notion of a conceptual scheme unintelligible. If meaning is contaminated by theory as Kuhn and Feyerabend have convinced us, then 'giving up the analytic-synthetic distinction as basic to the understanding of language is to give up the idea that we can clearly distinguish between theory and language' (Davidson, 1974, p. 187). However, if a scheme is defined as a conceptual or linguistic framework to form its cognitive content by organizing its empirical content, we must be able to distinguish somehow a scheme from its cognitive content (belief or theory) as well as from its empirical content. This in turn implies a distinction between the language used to describe a scheme and the theory used to describe experience. Furthermore, without some kind of analytic-synthetic distinction and scheme-content distinction in place, there is no way to tell whether two alleged conceptual schemes contain different concepts or simply embody different beliefs. Therefore, complete abandonment of the analytic-synthetic distinction and the scheme-content distinction would lead to self-destruction of the very notion of conceptual schemes.

It may be true that the meanings of expressions used in the formulation of a theory are introduced, changed, or redefined by the theory itself, but it does not follow that no distinction can be made between the language used to formulate a theory and the theory couched within the language. After we abandon the fixed, sharp analytic-synthetic distinction, the organizing role that was exclusively attributed to analytic sentences and the empirical content that was supposedly peculiar to synthetic sentences are now seen as shared and diffused by all sentences of a language. However, it does not mean that all sentences play equal roles in forming our beliefs. Use Quine's metaphor of 'a web of beliefs': Sentences in the center of the web are those we are most reluctant to give up and are primarily used to describe the scheme of concepts. Those sentences play primarily the organizing role in the formation of beliefs. Confronted with the conflict of experience, we would prefer to keep those sentences fixed by comparison to the sentences on the fringes that we would more easily revise in the light of experience. We can still call the former 'analytic sentences' in a modified sense that the truths of those sentences are widely accepted and fully protected by their users, but they are subject to revision also.

To illustrate such a non-fixed, fuzzy analytic-synthetic distinction, Wittgenstein's riverbed metaphor comes in handy.<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein asks us

to imagine our worldview as a riverbed, where the bed of a river represents certain 'hardened propositions,' which is the scheme or the essential conceptual core of the worldview, while the river running on the bed represents the mass of our ever-changing belief systems. 'The river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division between one or the other' (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 15e). On the one hand, our conceptual schemes are relatively fixed and firm over a certain period within a certain context. They form and guide our beliefs. On the other hand, our beliefs, as the rushing waters of the river could slowly change the shape of the riverbed and alter the course of the river, could change our schemes over time. Therefore, the distinction between the scheme/language and its cognitive content (belief and theory) can be drawn relatively: There is a non-fixed, fuzzy distinction between the statements about the scheme of concepts, i.e. the language on the one hand and the statements expressing beliefs of reality/experience, i.e. the theory on the other. Our concepts are no longer thought of being *a priori*, but being *posteriori* in the sense that meaning and concepts are both bearers and the products of our factual beliefs; concepts are not only the tools of inquiry but also its products.

A similar dialectical interaction exists between a scheme and its empirical content. Our concepts are products of our experience in the form of an unquestioned vast majority of our beliefs about nature. But our experience itself is richly endowed with conceptual inputs. We will never encounter situations with a conceptual *tabula rasa*. There can be no rigid, sharp distinction between a scheme and its empirical contents, namely, between the Kantian *a priori* scheme and preschematic experiential input. Nevertheless, it does not mean for one moment that no meaningful distinction between certain schemes and experience can be drawn at all. In fact, our conceptual framework consists of multiple layers of schemes. At the bottom is our most fundamental set of concepts, dispositions, pre-judgments, or presuppositions, which I call basic experiential concepts. Like P. F. Strawson's basic concepts, these experiential concepts may constitute 'a certain minimal conceptual structure' 'essential to any conception (comprehensible to us) of the experience of self-conscious beings' (Strawson, 1992, p. 26). They are highly general and pervasive, permeate every facet of our sensory experience, and presupposed by our experience in general. In this sense, the basic experiential concepts can be plausibly said to 'structure' or 'schematize' experiential input from nature, whatever it may be.

However, unlike the Kantian categorical concepts that are *a priori*, independent of any experience, the scheme of our basic experiential concepts is *globally a posteriori* as a product of our experiences. They evolve through human interaction with the natural and social environment

during millions of years of human evolution. Unlike the Kantian concepts that are absolutely basic, i.e. having a fixed and invariant structure, basic experiential concepts are not absolutely basic in a Kantian sense. Instead, they are *hypothetically* or *historically* basic in the sense that based on our past evolutionary history and current structure of environment, those concepts are foundational – that is, universally presupposed by our experience. But we acknowledge that changes in the nature of those concepts could occur over time – for example, if our evolutionary path is altered in the future due to some unforeseeable dramatic environment change. Although I cannot give an exhaustive list of all basic experiential concepts here, they are concepts mostly related to our sense perceptions and individuation, duration, and identity of objects within space and time. For example, to experience the lovely, beautiful flower in front of me right now on the table, I need to have a concept of differentiation (such that I can distinguish the flower from its background), a concept of relative stability of the object (I know that it will not melt into thin air in the next moment), a concept of identity (I know it is the same flower sent to me by my lover yesterday), a concept of myself (I am the subject who is enjoying the flower), a concept of space and time, and so on. We can safely assume, based on Darwinian evolution theory, that there are some basic experiential concepts shared by human cultures and societies.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, they are global or universal.

Accordingly, our common-sense experience is the product of the dialectical interaction between our basic experiential concepts and experiential input from nature, whatever it may be, such that there is no way to separate which is form and which is content. The notion of ‘experiential input from nature’ is, borrowing Rescher’s comment on the notion of scheme-independent reality, ‘not *constitutive*, not as a substantial constituent of the world – in contrast with ‘mere appearance’ – but a purely regulative idea whose function to block the pretensions of any one single scheme to a monopoly on correctness or finality’ (Rescher, 1980, p. 337). In other words, I intend to use the notion to emphasize the empirical root of our basic experiential concepts. Our common-sense experience thus can be thought to be a common content shared by other higher-level schemes. Hence, we can have commonality without neutrality.

Besides our basic experiential concepts as the foundation of our conceptual and experiential life, there are some more advanced sets of concepts or metaphysical presuppositions associated with cultures, intellectual traditions, or languages. Some of those conceptual schemes are radically distinct and schematize our rudimentary common-sense experience in different ways to form diverse worldviews, cosmologies, or ways of life. The presence of different conceptual schemes manifests itself most dramatically when we come across some different ways of categorizing what seems to be the common experience. A best-known case

would be classification of color in different cultures. As the literature on color amply demonstrates, apparently individually identifiable color samples, which two cultural groups presumably experience in the same way – assuming they all have normal vision, are often categorized into very different color systems in terms of different concepts of color. Similar examples are plentiful in anthropological and historical literatures that have often been discussed by scholars in other areas, such as cognitive scientists, psychologists, and linguists. If not only what one experiences determines what one believes, but also what one believes shapes what one experiences (the thesis of the theory-ladenness of observation), communities that adopt two radically distinct conceptual schemes and accordingly different worldviews would have different ‘more conceptually enriched experiences,’ so to speak. This is the reason why Thomas Kuhn makes a seemingly absurd claim that those communities ‘live in two different worlds.’

## 5. *Conclusion*

Davidson’s arguments against the notion of conceptual scheme and conceptual relativism have a very limited scope: His arguments from invariability can only apply to the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes that mistakenly construes conceptual schemes as sentential languages; his arguments against scheme-content dualism are targeted only at the Kantian scheme-content dualism. Therefore, Davidson’s arguments are successful insofar as the Quinean notion of conceptual schemes and Kantian scheme-content dualism are concerned, but cannot be validly extended to a more robust notion of conceptual schemes and non-Kantian scheme-content dualism. The two essential doctrines of conceptual relativism – scheme-content dualism and alternative conceptual schemes – are undamaged by Davidson’s attacks. I have argued that scheme-content dualism neither entails nor presupposes the Kantian scheme-content dualism. In giving up the Kantian scheme-content dualism, we do not give up scheme-content dualism. Conceptual relativism can sustain a viable version of scheme-content dualism not subject to the charge of the third dogma. Conceptual relativism does not need to detach itself from the world as it is experienced by us through introducing any epistemological intermediary between the world and us. We stand together with Davidson and Rorty to applaud the loss of the Kantian world-as-it-is and the dissolution of the given, but we do not lose our world as it is experienced by us on the way. On the contrary, in terms of our conceptual schemes, we are connected to the world as close as possible; only through conceptual schemes can we be connected to the world. As a non-dogmatic empiricism, conceptual relativism, as it is

properly construed, acknowledges our common experiential root and celebrates our conceptual diversity at the same time.

This is, I believe, a better reply to Davidson.

Philosophy Department  
Juniata College

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Most citations given in the text refer to the original years of publication; page references are to the reprinted editions as indicated in the list of references.

<sup>2</sup> As it will become clear in section 2, by placing the defenders of the notion of conceptual schemes and the friends of conceptual relativism shoulder to shoulder here does not imply a conflation of the doctrine of conceptual schemes and the doctrine of conceptual relativism.

<sup>3</sup> Although we can distinguish the scheme and the content of a conceptual scheme conceptually for the purpose of discussion, this does not mean that one can be fully understood and analyzed without the other. Obviously, the scheme and the content are the two sides of the same coin; one cannot exist without the other.

<sup>4</sup> To mention only a few from a long list: David Henderson (1994), P. M. S. Hacker (1996), and most notably, Michael Forster (1998).

<sup>5</sup> At least Nicholas Rescher and the late Thomas Kuhn do not subscribe to a conceptual scheme of this kind.

<sup>6</sup> Although Lynch identifies this first assumption in his 1998, he does not render a sufficient analysis and criticism.

<sup>7</sup> In Nathaniel Goldberg 2004, among the four versions of scheme-content dualism identified, only the second and the third versions directly relate to the content side of scheme-content dualism. Furthermore, he further reduces all the forms of the dualism to Davidson's argument against partial untranslatability or uninterpretability (the Kuhnian thesis of incommensurability as construed by Davidson).

<sup>8</sup> William Child (1994) and Maria Baghramian (1998) are some most notable exceptions.

<sup>9</sup> See Lynch, 1998 for a Neo-Kantian model of conceptual schemes.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Lynch (1998) may be the first calling such a notion the Quinean model of conceptual schemes. I have followed Lynch closely in my following description of the Quinean linguistic model of conceptual schemes.

<sup>11</sup> By the label 'the *Quinean* linguistic model,' I do not mean 'Quine's model' as such, namely, what Quine explicitly formulates and defends as his well-established notion. Rather, I intend to use the phrase to refer to one pervasive notion of conceptual schemes on the basis of the works of Quine and many other similar minded conceptual relativists such as Benjamin Whorf, C. I. Lewis, Thomas Kuhn (before the 1980s), Paul Feyerabend, and John Searle. In particular, it is the notion of conceptual schemes construed and criticized by Davidson. Of course, I fully realize that Davidson's discussion may be an uncharitable reading of Quine. In fact, Quine's own view on conceptual schemes is much more complicated than what we have summarized here.

<sup>12</sup> In a trivalent semantics, it is possible for a sentence to be neither true nor false, which corresponds to a lack of a classical truth-value (truth or falsity). In this case, it can be said that there is a truth-value gap regarding the sentence within a bivalent semantics. If a substantial number of core sentences of one language, when considered within the context of a competing language, lack classical truth-values, then there is a truth-value gap between the two languages.

<sup>13</sup> In a trivalent semantics, a sentence could be true-or-false (having a truth-value) or neither-true-nor-false (having no truth-value). Not like the truth-value of a statement that concerns whether a statement is true or false, the truth-value status of a sentence concerns whether a sentence has a truth-value. Therefore, we can evaluate a sentence in two separate stages: first, determine its truth-value-status, i.e. is it a candidate for true or false? Second, supposing a positive answer to the first, is the statement true or false?

<sup>14</sup> Rorty (1972, p. 5) and Lewis (1929, p. 37) suggest that the scheme-content distinction relies on, and is motivated by the analytic-synthetic distinction, and hence the former should be seen as a variant of the latter. In some places, Davidson (1974, p. 189) seems to suggest that the duality of scheme-content commits one to or supports the analytic-synthetic distinction.

<sup>15</sup> The Wittgenstein's metaphor is used by Michael Lynch (1998, pp. 416–7).

<sup>16</sup> Many wild thought experiments about possible creatures endowed with substantially different thick experience from humans, such as the visitors from the Mars with different ranges of sensory perceptions from humans, assume a radically different environment from ours.

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