

Davidson's Holism:

Epistemology in the Mirror of Meaning

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To Margaret

The methodology of interpretation is... nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning.

– Donald Davidson, 'Thought and Talk'

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Foreword

Although extensively revised during 2002, and again in 2010, the core of this book, originally published as Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning, was written between 1987 and 1991. Davidson read the original typescript after attending the NEH seminar on ‘Heidegger and Davidson: Critics of Cartesianism’ organized by Hubert Dreyfus at Santa Cruz in 1990, sending me a faxed message shortly after the seminar that read: ‘Am chagrined to have to admit that I have only just read your book. Would have learned more by staying home and reading it than by attending the recent seminar. Do you have a publisher?’ As it happened, the book had at that stage already been accepted for publication by Cambridge University Press.

It appeared in print at the same time as Jerry Fodor and Ernest LePore’s, Holism: A Shopper’s Guide, as well as Akeel Bilgrami’s, Belief and Meaning. Bilgrami’s book shared some similar themes with The Mirror of Meaning, particularly the idea that holism requires a principle of ‘localism’ or what I term ‘horizontality’.¹ Fodor and LePore’s volume, on the other, represented quite a different and rather less sympathetic approach, taking issue with arguments for holism as they were supposed to appear in a number of different writers including Davidson.² In the decade or so since, holism itself has received some, but not a great deal of more extensive elaboration. The main reason for this, it seems to me, is simply that holism, particularly in the form that it is developed in Davidson’s or in my own work, is not well understood. Not only that, but holism, or ‘contextualism’ as it is sometimes also called, has increasingly been seen as a threat to most standard theories of language and meaning, and so when it is discussed it is usually in a manner that is concerned to dismiss rather than to understand.. For these reasons alone, a new edition of this book seems worthwhile. Moreover, recent years have also seen a great deal of additional interest in possible convergence between ‘analytic’ and so-called ‘continental’ philosophy and the exploration of such convergence that appears in these pages remains extremely relevant – perhaps even more so than when it first appeared – while the appearance of the new and revised editions of Davidson’s essays make it possible to read the development of his thinking, and the role of holism in that thinking, with greater clarity.

Although the text published here is indeed a revised, and, in some cases, expanded, the main lines of argument have been left unchanged (although the account of indeterminacy, of the treatment of the role

of propositionality, and the discussion of truth have been substantially modified in ways that reflect what I hope is my own better understanding of the issues at stake – the title has also been returned to something closer to that which I originally envisaged). Indeed, I take the fact that I have been able to leave so much the argument here in a relatively unaltered form to be an indication that the ideas as originally set out were quite faithful to the direction of Davidson’s own thinking – even if the exact manner in which those ideas are developed here, particularly the use of notions taken from phenomenology, hermeneutics and semiotics, is rather different from anything to be found in Davidson. This seems to me to be confirmed by the way in which the holism that is the central focus for my account became an increasingly important, if sometimes still under-developed, theme in Davidson’s own writing over the last fifteen years or so. The idea of triangulation, in particular, which can itself be seen as a development out of the notion of charity, and the associated idea of the indispensability of a notion of objectivity in understanding, is particularly significant in this regard. In triangulation, arguably the central idea in Davidson’s later writing, the idea of what I here termed ‘psychological holism’ (which on my account is seen as itself incorporating an externalist commitment) can be seen as being developed through the notion of the interdependence, not only of the attitudes and behavior of individual agents and speakers, but also of the concepts of the subjective, the objective and the intersubjective.

It remains the case, however, that the account I offer here goes far beyond anything that is made explicit in Davidson’s own published work. Indeed, while Davidson has acknowledged his commitment to a form of holism, he also sometimes seems to present a much narrower view of holism than I do here, commenting, at one point, that ‘My form of holism is mainly a logical constraint.’³ Similarly Davidson often seems to have viewed holism in a way that keeps it relatively distinct in relation to other elements in his position, notably from his externalist commitments and from the indeterminacy thesis. In contrast, my account is explicit in pushing for a view of holism as quite radical and far-reaching, and as actually encompassing, in one way or another, both indeterminacy and externalism. Indeed, in my view, it is holism that drives most of the other ideas that are at issue here. In this respect, and although I was more hesitant on this point when the book was first published (see the comments in the ‘Introduction’ below), I would now say that the book should be read not merely as an attempt at exegesis and defense of the underlying Davidsonian position, but also as a development of that position in a way that can also be seen as

something of a challenge to Davidson's own elaboration of his ideas – whether Davidson was himself able or willing to travel all the way in this direction or not, it is the direction in which I believe many of his core ideas naturally lead. In addition, of course, the book continues to present a way of approaching Davidson that enables his work, and certain aspects of the analytic tradition more broadly, to be seen, not as apart from and opposed to the European tradition, especially the tradition of hermeneutic thought, but in many important ways convergent with it. One might argue that this is something already evident in Rorty's work, but although his writing provided an important part of the context in which this book was written, Rorty's approach is very different from that elaborated here. One of the reasons, therefore, for thinking that a new edition of this book is warranted is not only to update some of its ideas in the light of the work Davidson produced from 1992-2003, nor because it remains the only systematic study of Davidsonian holism – a holism that often seems to be dealt with in all too summary a fashion within the narrowly analytic re-appropriation of Davidson being led by such as LePore and Ludwig – but also because it seems timely once again to reassert the claim concerning the continuity of Davidsonian with hermeneutic thinking. Thus one of the key claims of this book is that Davidson's work represents perhaps the most important point within the analytic tradition from which it connects with hermeneutic thinking – and this remains so, in my view, in spite of the work more recently undertaken by such as Brandom and McDowell (work that is arguably itself dependent on the work of Davidson).

I had not expected, when I began the revisions of the volume, that Davidson would not himself be around to see the new edition when it appeared – he had promised to write something for the new edition and I had sent him a copy of the revised typescript not long before his unexpected death (the sudden turn of events also meant that I put the project to one side and only recently returned to it). His intellectual vitality, to say nothing of the very full and active nature of his life, makes it all the harder to accept the fact of his passing. Although I knew him only in his later years – we first met in 1992, when I went to Berkeley at his invitation – I will always be grateful to Don for his personal and intellectual generosity, for the enormous amount I learnt from him, and for the ideas that he opened up.

Acknowledgements

This has not been an easy book to write, and in some ways the task of writing it has been a lonely one. Yet this has not been for want of the encouragement and assistance of many people. Special thanks are due first to my wife Margaret, for many things (including the proof-reading of the final typescript) and for her love and support over the past years~ I am also especially grateful to Fred D 'Agostino, who not only read through many pages, and was willing to consider some strange ideas, but who has been the best of friends and colleagues. Judith Ayling, Graeme Butler, Robyn Ferrell, Peter Gilet, Don Letham, Michael P. Levine, Horst Ruthrof, Philip Pettit and Jack Smart have each contributed (in many different ways) to the writing of this book and I thank all of them. I must also thank Donald Davidson for showing support and encouragement for the project in its latter stages. Finally, I must acknowledge a longstanding debt both in friendship and philosophy to Carl Page.

In addition to the original list of acknowledgements, thanks also go to Irene Sawford for doing the work in transferring the book back into electronic form ready for revision, as well as to Eliza Goddard for additional bibliographic work. The most important acknowledgement, however, must be to Davidson himself – as he said of Quine, 'without whom not'.

Introduction: Radically Interpreting Davidson

‘The ‘doctrine’ of a thinker is that which is left unsaid’ – Martin Heidegger, ‘Plato’s Doctrine of Truth’

‘The methodology of interpretation,’ says Davidson, ‘is nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning’. But what does it mean to ‘see’ epistemology in ‘the mirror of meaning’? How could this illuminate ‘the methodology of interpretation’? While Davidson does not himself unpack the details of this passage, it is certainly possible to give a fairly straightforward explanation of what he means. The methodology of interpretation must be a methodology designed to resolve the central interpretive problem of providing a theory for interpreting utterances. For Davidson this must mean resolving the problem set by the entanglement of meanings with beliefs. To see epistemology in the mirror of meaning is to see belief in its relation to truth (a problem typically approached by the epistemologist in terms of the justification of beliefs) in the light of meaning itself. The passage thus sets out the central task of Davidson’s work in this area: the task is the elaboration of a theory of meaning, or, as it might be more suggestively put, the elaboration of a theory of interpretation. But, in addition, the way Davidson characterizes that task is such as to set out the form that elaboration will take: namely, an articulation of the relations between belief, meaning and truth. Indeed, resolving the problem of interpretation is identical with (‘nothing but’) the task of understanding the relations between these three concepts.

Davidson does not himself provide this sort of elucidation, and it is largely because he does not do so – on this and other matters – that this book has been both possible and necessary (at least for myself). It is Davidson’s account of interpretation, undertaken through an investigation of the particular circumstances of ‘radical interpretation’, that is the main focus for this book. But the Davidsonian account has often suggested much more than it spells out; while Davidson’s own philosophical style is often condensed and even opaque. Thus, the aim of this book is to provide an articulation and development of Davidson’s account of interpretation and of some of the philosophical consequences of that account. In particular, the book provides an account of the holism that seems so clearly to underlie the Davidsonian position. In the course of developing that account, I have attempted to fill gaps, to argue for positions and to suggest

interesting lines of development or similarity from the original Davidsonian starting point. Sometimes this may have led me away from the pure Davidsonian text, but it is the matters at issue that have been my guide here. Wherever possible I have tried to find support for the views I have advanced in Davidson's own words; where he has expressed himself in such a way as to clearly conflict with those views I have tried to indicate the disagreement and to show the reasons behind it. What I have done in the following pages is thus to sketch a Davidson who is implicit in the Davidsonian text, rather than attempt to somehow reconstruct Davidson's own explicit views.

Some readers might feel, nevertheless, that I have not been sufficiently critical of Davidson in this book. One response to this is that my primary aim has been to develop and expound the Davidsonian position (or a version of it) in as convincing a manner as possible, rather than to criticize it. Another, and more accurate, response is to say that my whole approach is a critical one, but it is a critique that arises out of my own development and deployment of the Davidsonian position itself. One could say that my approach is critical in something like the sense of an 'immanent critique', insofar as it is a critique based on an acceptance of many of the basic Davidsonian premises. But the critical element in the book appears less in terms of explicit disagreement with Davidson (though such disagreement is not absent), as in the attempt to reinterpret the direction of the Davidsonian project. In this respect it is a critique insofar as it is also a 'radical interpretation' of Davidson's work – an attempt to reconstruct the Davidsonian position as an integrated whole. This is evident in Part II, where I introduce structuralist, phenomenological and hermeneutical ideas in order to develop the idea of holism that is implicit in Davidson's work. Yet the 'radical' nature of my interpretation does not become fully explicit until the concluding section of the concluding chapter where I discuss the Davidsonian conception of truth. In discussing truth I make a claim that may well appear absurd to some: I argue that if we are to try to come fully to terms with the nature and role of truth in Davidson's work, then we are inevitably led in the direction of the Heideggerian notion of truth as aletheia. For some this may seem a ridiculous idea from the start: to connect Davidson, surely one of the major figures in contemporary 'analytic' philosophy, with Heidegger at his most obscure. If the idea seems ridiculous to some, I believe it will not seem so to those who are at all familiar with the work of these two thinkers.¹

That there is a connection between Heidegger and Davidson worth pursuing seems to me the obvious implication of the, almost commonplace, although often undeveloped, observation of similarities between Davidson and Gadamer.² For, while Gadamer's thought is in many ways less radical than Heidegger's, it nevertheless grows out of Heidegger's thinking and cannot be understood independently of it. Heidegger is thus essential to the Gadamerian account of interpretation, and, just as I suggest points of similarity between Davidson and Gadamer, so I also make use of both Heideggerian and Husserlian notions to provide an articulation of the holism that I argue is implicit in the Davidsonian account of radical interpretation. It is, moreover, Heidegger who, more than any other twentieth-century philosopher, has made truth the central idea in his thinking (indeed the Heideggerian account of truth is largely what lies behind Gadamerian hermeneutics). Given Davidson's own treatment of truth as a central notion – its role as, what I call in chapter seven, a 'horizontal' notion – it seems only natural to look to the work of Heidegger in this respect.

Heidegger's approach to philosophical issues is, of course, very different – not least in method and style – from that adopted by Davidson. Given what would otherwise seem to be the enormous differences between the work of these two thinkers, the conclusion I reach here – that the Davidsonian position depends on something like the Heideggerian notion of truth as aletheia for its completion – might be taken to be indicative of a deep tension within the account that gives rise to that conclusion. Some readers may even be led to wonder whether the account I offer is really an account of Davidson at all – whether it is not, perhaps, a thinly disguised piece of Heideggerian exegesis that merely uses Davidson as its starting point. That latter question can only be answered through a consideration of the arguments that I offer below. In fact, I think I show that there is strong ground for seeing, at the very least, a close similarity between many central Heideggerian and Davidsonian theses. Whether I am correct in my further claim as to the relevance of the Heideggerian notion of truth may be a more difficult matter to decide - although, once again, any such decision will need to take account of the considerations that I set forth in these pages.

I must confess, however, that I have often felt a certain tension in the project that I undertake here. Does my account, perhaps, diverge too far from that of Davidson? How much is it really consistent with the Davidsonian project? Of course any attempt to seriously read the work of another must encounter some tension in this respect, since there are always difficulties in locating the reading that results in relation to

the original text. Maybe the tension has felt stronger here because I have been attempting, in part, to bridge what some of my colleagues and teachers certainly seem to have viewed as an unbridgeable chasm.

Moreover, if my reading is even partly correct, then there is an inevitable tension within the Davidsonian position itself in its marriage of an implicitly hermeneutical approach with the more formal and 'technical' approaches of semantic theory and philosophy of language. Usually such approaches have been seen as mutually antagonistic. The implicit suggestion of this book is that any such antagonism actually conceals the way in which the 'technical' approach, while quite legitimate in its own terms, nevertheless presupposes (and thus does not oppose) the hermeneutical.³

The first part of this book – chapters one and two – attempts to set out the Quinean background to Davidson's views, and then to provide an account of the fundamentals of the Davidsonian position. Chapter one is largely a discussion of Quinean 'radical translation', while chapter two discusses the development of 'radical translation' into Davidsonian 'radical interpretation'. These first two chapters are relatively introductory, and some readers may prefer to move immediately onto to the core of the argument that begins in chapter three. Even the reader who is familiar with the details of the Davidsonian project may, however, find the second half of chapter two (§2.2) useful in providing an orientation to the major themes I intend to develop.

The central part of the book – Part II (comprising chapters three, four and five) – attempts to develop a more detailed account of the nature of the holism that seems to be presupposed by radical interpretation, and to this end deploys ideas taken from phenomenological and hermeneutical thinking. Chapter three is a discussion of the holistic structure of the psychological; chapter four develops the idea of such holism, particularly the indeterminacy that it seems to imply, with reference to the ideas of 'intentionality' and 'horizontality'. Chapter five deals with the principle of charity, and the holistic character of understanding – as a result, triangulation is also important here. The three chapters that make up this central section – particularly chapters three and four – are essentially a bridge between the Davidsonian position sketched in chapter two and the working out of the epistemological and metaphysical consequences of that position in the final section of the book. These middle chapters attempt to develop a fuller account of the holism that seems implicit in the Davidsonian position, but that Davidson has really only sketched.⁴ For this reason the focus in these chapters is often less on Davidson and more on the work

of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, since it is there, I claim, that the basis for a fuller account of holism is to be found.

In the final part of the book, I return to what may appear to be more familiar Davidsonian material – problems of knowledge and truth – considered in the light of the fuller account of holism that has been developed. Chapter six is a discussion of relativism and skepticism, while in chapter seven I consider the bearing of Davidsonian holism on the contemporary dispute between realism and anti-realism. There I also attempt to articulate the central problem that runs throughout this work (though it remains largely implicit until chapter seven): what might be called ‘the problem of truth’. It is in this chapter that I argue for a view of Davidson as a ‘realist’, though perhaps of a somewhat idiosyncratic sort, and in which I also suggest a Heideggerian transformation of the Davidsonian position in relation to truth.

Arthur Schopenhauer said of his major work in philosophy that ‘What is to be imparted by it is a single thought.’⁵ While such a comment might be taken as a truism applicable, in some sense, to almost any philosophical work, it nevertheless seems to be particularly appropriate for my own work here. It applies not only in terms of a unity of theme, but also a unity of method. The single thought is just the thought that the psychological realm possesses a certain holistic structure. It is this thought that is worked out in various forms through each of the book’s three parts. The holism of the psychological, however, turns out to be a holism that characterizes, not only the relations between elements of the psychological realm (beliefs, desires and so forth), but understanding itself – as well as having important implications for knowledge, and for the way we conceive of ourselves in relation to the world. Moreover, insofar as this work is itself an attempt to understand, so holism characterizes and determines the work itself. The way in which such holism characterizes this work can also be taken as indicative of a corresponding view of Davidson’s own thinking: it is a certain holistic conception of things, and a holistic way of thinking, that I take to be the determining factor in Davidson’s work.

The methodology that I have adopted here is thus itself an implicitly holistic and hermeneutic one.⁶ Indeed the very attempt to develop a more integrated account of the Davidsonian position could be seen as a thoroughly hermeneutical project. And this is reflected in the idea of attempting what is almost a ‘radical interpretation’ of Davidson’s own position. The adoption of such a hermeneutic approach is not only suggested by the Davidsonian focus on interpretation, but is intimately bound up with the holistic

notions that the book attempts to articulate. For, as a philosophical methodology, hermeneutics develops out of an explicitly holistic approach to problems of interpretation and understanding. It can be seen as arising out of a recognition of the holistic structure of meaning, either in particular meaning systems (such as in literary texts) or in systems of meaning in general. The holistic conception of meaning on which hermeneutics is founded is, indeed, encapsulated in the very idea of the hermeneutic circle in which the understanding of the part is dependent on the understanding of the whole and vice versa. In Heidegger, that hermeneutic circle seems almost to have become a spiral – it looks downward to illuminate the depths of understanding itself, but its spiraling movement also represents an ever increasing and widening articulation of understanding. This hermeneutic movement, a movement that I would myself describe in terms of the dialogue of understanding, means that the development of ideas in my own work here is not strictly linear; rather the central themes are reiterated in various ways in different sections of the work. So, in this book, I not only attempt to provide an account of what I shall call later ‘psychological holism’, but the account is itself holistic. Thus the structure and method of the book mirror its essential theme.

This talk of ‘mirroring’ itself mirrors the Davidsonian quotation with which this book begins. I have already provided some elaboration of what ‘seeing epistemology in the mirror of meaning’ might mean and how that might relate to ‘the methodology of interpretation’. The connotations of Davidson’s use of the idea of the ‘mirror’ are, however, interesting in themselves. One might think of a holistic system on the model of a system of mirrors, rather than a single mirror, and of the mirrors as mirroring each other in a play of reflections or of meanings. In this way one arrives at an analogue – itself a mirroring – of the holism that is so central to my account. But there are other connections also. We see things in mirrors. Mirrors show things. Umberto Eco points out that, in a sense, mirrors do not lie.⁷ Mirrors show us what is. Meaning also shows us what is. But meaning does not reflect things in the sense of a Rortyan ‘mirror of nature’.⁸ The mirror of meaning is not a mirror that re-presents the world, and the world is not reflected in meaning. Rather, on my account, the world is the mirror of meaning. Within the world, meaning is constituted; only within the world do things appear as meaningful. Only within the horizon of the world is meaning even possible.

I. FROM TRANSLATION TO INTERPRETATION

1. The Quinean background

The work of W. V. O. Quine forms the background for the Davidsonian development of the idea of radical interpretation, and it is Quine's conception of the project of radical translation that marks Davidson's starting point. Indeed, the sections in Word and Object that deal with radical translation were themselves written at a time when Quine and Davidson were in close dialogue with one another, and one can see them as showing something close to some of Davidson's early thinking as much as Quine's. In Word and Object, and in Quine's work more generally, we first encounter the ideas that are central to radical interpretation: holism, indeterminacy and charity. These are the ideas around which the three central chapters of Part II will be organized. Yet, in Quine, these ideas are not explicitly drawn out or interconnected, and only with Davidson does their full import become apparent – and even then, not immediately. The essential feature of Davidsonian radical interpretation is, indeed, the reorganization of the ideas of indeterminacy and charity around a holistic conception of the nature of interpretation – a reorganization that is finally worked out in terms of the idea of triangulation. This is a reorganization that I will be carrying further in later chapters. It is, however, with Quine that I shall begin.

1.1 Radical translation and naturalized epistemology

In Word and Object¹ Quine presents the problems of the philosophy of language in an explicitly anthropological setting. Quine's interest there is in the relation between language and the world, but in Quine's work this is as part of the more general project of a 'naturalized epistemology'. Quine's contention is that epistemology – the branch of philosophy that deals with questions about the nature and basis of claims to know – is 'best looked upon ... as an enterprise within natural science'² The traditional epistemological problem of finding some certain base for knowledge is thus largely abandoned by Quine.³ Instead he argues for a conception of epistemology as a much more modest scientific project concerned

with charting the relationship between the empirical evidence we receive through our senses and the beliefs that we form on the basis of that evidence. Quine writes that:

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input – certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance – and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one's theory of nature transcends any available evidence.⁴

The philosophy of language does, of course, have an important part to play in this epistemological project, since the attempt to understand the relation between evidence and theory, or between sensory stimulation and belief, necessarily raises questions about how theories are to be understood and how the utterances in which beliefs are expressed are to be interpreted. We need, after all, to be able to identify beliefs before we can begin to ask about the evidence for them. As the investigation of language and translation is seen as a part of the wider project of epistemology, and as Quine's epistemological project is seen as a matter of understanding the relation between 'surface irritations' and 'knowledge of the world' (the relation between 'meager input' and 'torrential output'),⁵ so he understands the philosophy of language in the same naturalistic fashion. Consequently, the chapter of Word and Object that deals with the problem of translation – chapter two – has as its avowed aim the consideration of 'how much of language can be made sense of in terms of its stimulus conditions, that is, in terms of 'the past and present barrage of non-verbal stimulation.' Language is conceived by Quine as 'the complex of present dispositions to verbal behavior'⁶ In keeping with this view, he presents the general task of translation as one that involves the reconstruction of the connections between present dispositions, and past and present stimulations:

The recovery of a man's current language from his currently observed responses is the task of the linguist who, unaided by an interpreter, is out to penetrate and translate a language hitherto unknown. All the objective data he has to go on

are the forces that he sees impinging on the native's surfaces and the observable behavior, vocal and otherwise, of the native.⁷

One of the two quotations placed at the beginning of Word and Object is the punning slogan 'Ontology recapitulates philology'⁸. It is certainly clear that, for Quine, translation recapitulates epistemology. Translation is seen as essentially concerned with uncovering the connections between surface stimulations (the 'meager input') and verbal and non-verbal behavior (the 'torrential output') – the same connections that the naturalized epistemologist seeks to unravel.⁹ Of course, that this is the essential concern of translation is something often obscured, in practice by the translator's reliance on her prior linguistic knowledge, that is, by her prior acquaintance with her own, and other, languages. For this reason, Quine's consideration of translation is restricted to cases of what he calls 'radical' translation, where no such prior knowledge can be relied upon:

Translation between kindred languages, e.g., Frisian and English, is aided by resemblance of cognate word forms. Translation between unrelated languages, eg., Hungarian and English, may be aided by traditional equations that have evolved in step with a shared culture. What is relevant rather to our purposes is radical translation, i.e., translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people. The task is one that is not in practice undertaken in its extreme form, since a chain of interpreters of a sort can be recruited of marginal persons across even the darkest archipelago.¹⁰

The notion of radical translation is an idealization of the project of translation. It exhibits that project in its purest form, a form that provides the basic framework for the Davidsonian account of interpretation. Of course, one might object that Quine conceives of the nature of the translational project in terms that are far too narrow. While reliance on prior linguistic knowledge may not be essential to the translator's task,¹¹ surely that task consists in more than just the correlation of behavior with perceptual stimulations. Certainly Quine does conceive of translation in very narrow terms, but this should not obscure the fact that it is, nevertheless, to behavioral evidence that we must look, in the first instance, in the translation of utterances. As Davidson points out, 'language is intrinsically social. This does not entail that truth and meaning can be defined in terms of observable behavior, or that it is "nothing but" observable behavior; but it does imply that meaning is entirely determined by observable behavior, even readily observable behavior.'¹²

1.2 Meaning and indeterminacy

It is out of the consideration of the problems faced by the radical translator that Quine develops his well-known thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. Quine claims that:

manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose. The firmer the direct links of a sentence with non-verbal stimulation, of course, the less drastically its translations can diverge from one another from manual to manual.¹³

Quine's claim that there is such indeterminacy in translation might be thought to be an unsurprising consequence of his restriction of the evidence that is available to the linguist. Certainly Quine himself has agreed with the claim made by some of his critics that the indeterminacy thesis is a consequence of his behaviorism.¹⁴ Quine explains this point by saying that 'There is nothing in linguistic meaning, then, beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances.'¹⁵ Quine sometimes seems, of course, to treat meaning as if it were reducible to behavior. And, while this is surely mistaken, there is a very close connection between meaning and behavior. This close connection can also be seen as giving rise to indeterminacy, but the need to look to behavioral evidence in order to translate is not the only, or even the primary, source of such indeterminacy. Indeed, the interconnection between meaning and behavior can itself be seen to depend on something more fundamental.

The underlying source of indeterminacy is, in fact, suggested in some remarks Quine makes on the problems associated with the clarification of the notion of stimulus meaning. The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a speaker is specified, in Word and Object, as the class of all stimulations that would prompt assent, in the case of affirmative stimulus meaning, and dissent, in the case of negative stimulus meaning.¹⁶ However, such a definition fails to exclude from the stimulus meaning of a sentence stimulations that prompt assent or dissent, as the case may be, in situations where such assent or dissent is dependent upon

collateral information. Quine illustrates this point with the example of a speaker who assents to the sentence 'Gavagai?' (tentatively translated as 'Rabbit?') on the occasion of some half-glimpsed movements in the grass – the assent is given because the speaker has earlier seen rabbits in the very same spot. Similar problems arise where the speaker's response is dependent upon some prior, socially shared information of which the linguist is ignorant. Intuitively it seems that the solution 'would be to accord to the affirmative meaning of 'Gavagai' just those stimulations that would prompt assent to 'Gavagai?' on the strength purely of an understanding of 'Gavagai' unaided by collateral information.'¹⁷ But such an intuitive solution will not work. This is because we cannot remove the effects of collateral information in such a way that just the 'pure meaning' will be revealed. We cannot do this because we do not have any grasp of the meaning as distinct from the effects of collateral information. Quine claims that 'we have made no general experimental sense of a distinction between what goes into a native's learning to apply an expression and what goes into his learning supplementary matters about the objects concerned.'¹⁸

This latter comment connects with a point Quine makes earlier in Word and Object in the context of a discussion of how we might come to understand a theory concerning a particular sort of object, for instance, a theory such as atomic or molecular theory. We might suppose that we could distinguish two stages in our understanding of the theory: first, we come to understand what the objects are the theory is about; second, we understand what the theory says about them. While it might be possible to maintain such a distinction in a very limited context, it is generally the case that no clear distinction of this sort will be possible since 'our coming to understand what the objects are is for the most part just our mastery of what the theory says about them. We do not learn first what to talk about and then what to say about it.'¹⁹ One cannot, then, separate off the meaning of a sentence from the collateral information that bears on that sentence. If we cannot separate meaning from information in such a way, then the notion that translation aims to capture meanings is seriously undermined. There can be no distinct item, which is the meaning, to be captured. Here is the tie-up with the indeterminacy thesis. As Dagfinn Føllesdal points out:

What we are after [in translating] is a way of separating out, in every sentence of our theory, one component, its meaning, which can then be correlated with corresponding meaning components in another's theory. Quine claims in 'Two Dogmas' and, with more detail and argument, in Word and Object that there is no distinction to be drawn,

generally, between meaning and information. They are inseparably intertwined and this inseparability of meaning and information is the crux of what Quine calls indeterminacy of translation.²⁰

The idea that one cannot clearly separate facts about language – about meanings – from facts about the world is certainly at the heart of the Quinean attack on the analytic-synthetic distinction in ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’²¹ The whole point of Quine’s argument there is to undermine the notion that particular statements can be said to relate to some particular empirical content. In developing his famous metaphor about science as ‘a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience’, Quine says:

the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly ... it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement ... Furthermore it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough changes elsewhere in the system.²²

Quine has himself referred to the underdetermination of theory by experience as the main ground for the indeterminacy thesis.²³ In making such a point, Quine clearly presupposes a distinction between underdetermination and indeterminacy. Underdetermination is, indeed, primarily an epistemological thesis – a thesis about the relationship between evidence and theory – and Quine does not see it as impugning the claim that there is something to be right or wrong about in physical theory. Indeterminacy, on the other hand, is an ontological thesis, since it involves the claim that there is no real fact of the matter as to the right or wrong way to translate an utterance. There is nothing in the world – no thing – that determines the accuracy or otherwise of some particular translation.²⁴

Underdetermination can, in Quine’s view, give rise to indeterminacy. In its own turn, however, underdetermination seems to arise largely out of Quine’s holistic conception of both theory and the relation between theory and experience. It is just such ‘epistemic’ holism that is involved in the above quotation from ‘Two Dogmas’ – in the idea of science as ‘a field of force’. In this respect Quine’s epistemic holism (what has been called the ‘Quine-Duhem’ thesis) can indeed be seen as providing the basis for both the

indeterminacy of interpretation (insofar as such holism underlies the inseparability of meaning and information) and the underdetermination of theory by evidence. In that case it is Quinean holism that is the proper source of Quinean indeterminacy.

Yet maybe one could argue that, in its own turn, the holistic nature of belief can be seen as a product of the inseparability of meaning and information. Consider how Føllesdal characterizes the indeterminacy thesis in relation to the underdetermination thesis:

The gist of Quine's argument is that given the underdetermination of our theory of nature, some sentences, at least, in our theory are not tied up with any particular pieces of evidence, or experience, but relate *via* the whole intervening theory to all of them. Thus such a sentence 'has no fund of experiential implications it can call its own.'²⁵

It is because the meaning of such a sentence cannot be separated from the information bound up with it that no direct link can be forged between the sentence, taken on its own, and any particular piece of experiential evidence. It is not merely that sentences within a theory are implied by or imply other sentences, but that sentences cannot be separated out, in terms of their meanings, from other sentences. Yet, of course, as Føllesdal says, this is so 'given the underdetermination', since the fact that theories are underdetermined by experience means that some sentences and sets of sentences will not be directly addressed by any particular item of experience. Experience will not always discriminate between sentences. Such underdetermination arises out of the holistic nature of belief. In other words, it is Quine's epistemic holism that is still at the bottom of things, even here. Perhaps, then, the correct way to view the matter is to see the inseparability of meaning and information as one aspect of a more general holism. Indeed, it is possible to show that the inseparability of meaning and information does derive from Quine's fundamental holism about beliefs.

It ought to be clear that the inseparability of meaning from information entails an interdependence between these two. This interdependence arises because it is impossible to determine the meanings of utterances in a way that is independent of the information or beliefs that bear on those utterances. How we translate depends on our assessment of collateral information, that is, on our assessment of beliefs.²⁶ Equally, our assessment of the relevant collateral information will be influenced by how we translate utterances. This is a direct consequence of the fact that any utterance to be translated is indicative of (or

expressive of or the embodiment of) some belief or beliefs.²⁷ Translation is as much a matter of finding out what beliefs (or desires, for they must be implicated here also) utterances can be used to express as it is about matching utterances. If we accept the thesis of epistemic holism, then such beliefs are of course part of a network – a ‘web’ – of other beliefs. As they are part of such a network, so they must stand in a relationship of interdependence with the other beliefs that make up that epistemic structure. Thus meanings are seen to be interdependent with beliefs – with ‘information’ – in virtue of the holistic nature of the belief system.

The inseparability and interdependence of meaning and belief can be seen as grounded in Quine’s holistic approach to belief itself. Such holism is, I have argued, the basis for the Quinean indeterminacy thesis. What must be clearly understood here, however, is that Quinean holism is not merely a thesis about how beliefs are understood or attributed – it is an ontological, and not merely an epistemological, thesis. This is crucial, since, if holism and the accompanying inseparability of meaning and belief affected were merely features that affected our knowledge of meanings and beliefs, then any indeterminacy would likewise be epistemological. In that case, it need not involve the denial of the existence of facts about the world (albeit, perhaps, inaccessible to us) that would tell in favor of a particular translation of utterances or identification of beliefs. Such indeterminacy would infect only our knowledge of meanings and beliefs, not the meanings and beliefs themselves – it would infect the practice of translation, without undermining the existence of some fact of the matter regarding translation. Quine, of course, insists that indeterminacy is indeed an ontological thesis in the sense I have indicated here – ‘where indeterminacy of translation applies’, he tells us ‘there is no fact of the matter’.²⁸ The conclusion I would draw from this (as well as from other remarks) is that Quine must conceive of the holism and inseparability theses as ontological also. That is, they are claims about the very beliefs to be attributed to speakers and the meanings to attach to utterances and are not, as claims, merely epistemological in character.²⁹ When we come to Davidson (see §2.2.1 below), we shall see that, on this point, Davidson takes a slightly different view – indeed, some of Davidson’s comments suggest a repudiation of certain elements of the Quinean indeterminacy thesis. What remains consistent between both Quine and Davidson, however, is that neither holism nor indeterminacy is merely a feature of our language such that, behind the indeterminacy, there always remains something more

determinate, but to which we cannot have access. Whatever determinacy there is, our language must be adequate to capturing it.

1.3 Analytical hypotheses and charity

It is holism, in one form or another, that determines the nature of the translational project. The development of a translation manual is not merely a matter of correlating utterances, but also presupposes the identification of beliefs.³⁰ Nor is it a matter of merely observing the linguistic and other behavior of native speakers. Certainly at the outset the linguist's task appears to consist in just the passive observation, and correlation, of stimulation and response. But at some point she will have to adopt the more active role of querying native speakers for assent to, or dissent from, sentences of the native language. Quine claims that this procedure will enable the linguist: to translate certain observational utterances; to identify the truth-functional connectives; to recognize sentences that can be assented to, or dissented from, irrespective of the stimulation (what might ordinarily be termed analytically true and analytically false sentences), and to identify occasion sentences that have the same intrasubjective stimulus meaning (though without being able to translate such sentences).³¹

Being able to do this will not, however, get the linguist as far as being able to provide a fully-fledged theory of translation. Yet even this much progress, although it still falls short of a theory of translation, cannot be made without certain prior assumptions about the native language. Such assumptions are made – necessarily so – even before one begins to actively interrogate speakers, and so the process of translation is never a wholly passive, 'observational' affair. One assumption that is especially important is that, as Davidson puts it, 'when the interpreter finds a sentence of the speaker the speaker assents to regularly under conditions he recognizes, he takes these conditions to be the truth conditions of the speaker's sentence.'³² This is the principle that has come to be known, in the work of Quine, Davidson and others, as the principle of charity.³³ It counsels us to assume that a speaker's utterances are mostly true. In Quine, the principle of charity is also given in a more specific form. Quine claims that we cannot but assume that the truth-functional connectives of the native language are identical with our own. We identify negation, conjunction and alternation in the native language just as we do at home.³⁴ The application of charity in this way is an approach that, as Quine points out, 'ill accords with a doctrine of "pre-logical mentality."³⁵ The latter doctrine, found primarily in the work of the French anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl,³⁶ involves the idea that 'primitive' societies operate with a different logic to our own, a logic that will

tolerate explicit contradiction and inconsistency. So, on this doctrine, it may be appropriate to translate a particular utterance of a speaker on the model of 'p and not-p'. If the principle of charity is accepted, however, such a translation ought, whenever possible, to be avoided. Quine argues, moreover, that we have no choice about accepting the charitable approach to translation:

what criteria [for translation] might one prefer? Wanton translation can make native sound as queer as one pleases. Better translation imposes our logic upon them, and would beg the question of pre-logicality if there were a question to beg. That fair translation preserves logical laws is implicit in practice even where, to speak paradoxically, no foreign language is involved. Thus when to our querying of an English sentence an English speaker answers 'Yes and no', we assume that the query is meant differently in the affirmation and negation; this rather than that he would be so silly as to affirm and deny the same thing ... The maxim of translation underlying all this is that assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language ... The common sense behind the maxim is that one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation – or, in the domestic case, linguistic divergence.³⁷

The principle of charity is obviously crucial to translation at this basic logical level. Yet, as the Davidsonian characterization of the principle suggests, the principle has a role at a higher level also, since the mere observation of connections between stimulations and responses, even coupled with the active querying of the natives, will not provide a theory of translation. Developing such a theory requires the Quinean linguist to employ, in addition, certain 'analytical hypotheses'. It is in the discussion of these hypotheses that Quine deals with what is, perhaps, the central aspect of the translator's work – for the development of a set of analytical hypotheses is the development of a manual for translation.

As Quine says: 'Taken together, the analytical hypotheses and auxiliary definitions constitute the linguist's jungle-to-English dictionary and grammar.'³⁸ The analytical hypotheses give a syntactic and semantic analysis of the native language in accordance with the sorts of results listed above (translation of observation sentences; translation of logical connectives; recognition of analytically true and false sentences; identification of occasion sentences with the same intrasubjective stimulus meaning). The requirement of accordance with those previous findings is not a strict requirement, however, and some tolerance is allowed. Here the principle of charity, already introduced at the level of observation sentences

and truth-functional connectives, will have some part to play once again. We need to exercise a certain degree of judgment in attributing beliefs of a bizarre or strange sort to the natives. Quine comments: 'For certainly, the more absurd or exotic the beliefs imputed to a people, the more suspicious we are entitled to be of the translations; the myth of the prelogical people marks only the extreme. For translation theory, banal messages are the breath of life.'³⁹ Yet the Quinean application of charity extends further still, with charity implicitly playing a role in the formulation of the analytical hypotheses:

There is reason to draw particular attention to the simple form of analytical hypotheses which equates a native word or construction to a hypothetical English equivalent. For hypotheses need thinking up, and the typical case of thinking up is the case where the linguist apprehends a parallelism in function between some component fragment of a translated whole native sentence and some component word of the translation of the sentence. Only in some such way can we account for anyone's ever thinking to translate a native locution radically into English as a plural ending, or as the identity predicate, or as a categorical copula, or as any other part of our domestic apparatus of objective reference. It is only by such outright projection of prior linguistic habits that the linguist can find general terms in the native language at all, or, having found them, match them with his own.⁴⁰

And Quine goes on, in this context, to characterize the method of analytical hypotheses in a way that also stands as a good characterization of the operation of charity: 'The method of analytical hypotheses is a way of catapulting oneself into the jungle language by the momentum of the home language. It is a way of grafting exotic shoots on to the old familiar bush.'⁴¹

It is commonplace to observe that Quine applies charity with respect only to observation sentences and the truth-functional connectives. But it seems that there is, implicit in Quine, a rather wider application of charity than just that. The principle of charity is built into the very methodology of translation just inasmuch as it plays a part in the formation of the analytical hypotheses. This must make the transition to Davidson's explicit application of charity across-the-board – to which I shall come shortly – much less abrupt. What I would emphasize here, however, is that the inseparability of meaning and information extends to such a basic level that one cannot, in any case, restrict the use of charity to just a particular class of utterances or certain parts of language. Even the Quinean notion of stimulus meaning is of little help in developing a theory of translation in the absence of charity. For, as Quine himself indicates in relation to

the analytical hypotheses 'stimulus meanings never suffice to determine even what words are terms, if any, much less what terms are coextensive... From the point of view of a theory of translational meaning the most notable thing about the analytical hypotheses is that they exceed anything implicit in any native's dispositions to speech behavior.'⁴²

Davidson has said that it is because he can find no use for Quine's notion of stimulus meaning that he opts for the application of charity across-the-board.⁴³ That the notion is redundant is, of course, suggested by Quine's own comments (quoted immediately above) to the effect that stimulus meanings have little or no role to play in the essential task of translation, that is, in the development of the analytical hypotheses. Davidson's explicit rejection of the notion of stimulus meaning is, nevertheless, a major point of difference between himself and Quine. It reflects a difference, not just in their approaches to translation or interpretation, but also in their respective epistemological positions. Thus Bjørn Ramberg writes that:

The concept of occasion sentences is an attempt to harness sensations for justificatory purposes. For Davidson this is an impossible task. Only beliefs can justify beliefs; the only evidence there can be for the truth of a sentence are other true sentences. Quine never draws this conclusion, and his failing to do so is the source of most of his disagreements with Davidson.⁴⁴

Disagreement over the role of occasion sentences in grounding beliefs can, of course, be seen as reflecting disagreement over the role of stimulus meaning – or *vice versa*. In either case Davidson can be seen as essentially objecting to a residual empiricism in Quine's position.⁴⁵ Such empiricism is rejected by Davidson, as he rejects the notion of stimulus meaning and the distinction, also in Quine, between conceptual scheme and empirical content (a distinction described by Davidson as 'the third dogma' of empiricism).⁴⁶

What forces the abandonment of these notions is Davidson's development of the idea of the inseparability of meaning and information into the interdependence of meaning and belief – what I shall term the thesis of 'psychological holism'. Taken further in Davidson's work (where it is transformed into a more explicit and all-encompassing holism) the inseparability of meaning from information decisively undermines the notion of any complete determinacy of meaning, whether of stimulus meaning or anything else. Davidson's rejection of stimulus meaning is thus associated with his adoption of a much broader

holism than is to be found in Quine. The notion of stimulus meaning is itself replaced by the idea that speakers are interpreted, at least in the most basic cases, according to the objects and events in their environment.⁴⁷ The latter idea is expressed in the Davidsonian conception of the principle of charity as the presupposition of a world common to both interpreter and speaker. In my development of Davidson's position, this idea will undergo a further transformation and elaboration.

As Davidson's holism is broader than Quine's, so too is Davidson's conception of the problem of translation itself much more broadly based. In Davidson it is not merely linguistic translation that is at issue. Translation is seen as only one aspect of the much larger project of interpretation with which it is necessarily implicated. Thus, with Davidson, we move from translation to interpretation.

2. The Davidsonian project

In moving from Quine to Davidson, we move from a focus on translation to one on the wider problem of interpretation. With this widening of focus the three central ideas of holism, indeterminacy and charity acquire a wider significance also. It is from within this broader Davidsonian framework that the real explorations of subsequent chapters will proceed. For it is, of course, the Davidsonian conception of radical interpretation and the ideas that flow from it, rather than the Quinean notion of radical translation, on which this book is focussed. Indeed, my aim here is to provide a more complete account of both the implications and presuppositions of Davidsonian radical interpretation than Davidson has so far provided. This will necessarily take me further than Davidson himself seems to go. Before that journey can be undertaken, however, I need first to sketch out the basic structure of the Davidsonian approach. It is that which is the aim of this second chapter.

2.1 The development of a theory of meaning

2.1.1 The semantic emphasis

While Davidsonian 'radical interpretation' clearly owes much to Quine's 'radical translation', the original Quinean themes undergo, in Davidson's hands, something of a transformation. Davidson's interest, like Quine's, is originally in the philosophy of language. But, whereas for Quine that interest is in the context of developing a canonical language for science, Davidson is much more interested in the theory of meaning as such. It is thus the development of a framework for semantic theory that is pursued by Davidson under the heading of radical interpretation. Davidson himself has said that the term 'radical interpretation' 'is meant to suggest a strong kinship with Quine's "radical translation."' ¹ Yet although there is indeed a familial connection here 'Kinship is not identity ... and "interpretation" in place of "translation" marks one of the differences: a greater emphasis on the explicitly semantical.' ²

The question Davidson sets for himself is: 'What knowledge would serve for interpretation?', ³ that is, for the interpretation of utterances. Put another way, what would we need to know to be able to

understand the words of another? It might be thought that there is a very straightforward and obvious answer to this question, an answer already to be found in Quine: what we need is a translation manual. However while a manual of translation will provide correlations between sentences in different languages, it may not provide a translation into a language we know, since both of the languages involved may be foreign to us. In that case the translation manual will not help us to understand. Of course, in the case where the translation happens to be into a language we already know, then the manual will indeed be sufficient for understanding the translated language, but only in that particular case. Moreover, such understanding will be possible only because of the additional linguistic knowledge we can bring to bear, that is, our prior knowledge of how to interpret the translating language.

There is, moreover, a further difficulty embedded here. Whether a particular translation manual enables us to understand particular utterances depends on our own linguistic knowledge and on the translating language. But a translation manual offers only correlations between utterances, and even a translation manual that translates into a language we understand will provide an understanding only of those particular utterances it translates. To be capable of understanding a language, rather than specific utterances in that language, we need a theory that will give us insight into the structure of the foreign utterances. Only if we have a grasp of how the meanings of sentences in a language are constructed will we have a learnable and usable theory of interpretation, for only then will we have a theory that can be applied to any sentence in the language, rather than to only some.⁴ So Davidson writes that ‘the method of translation leaves tacit and beyond the reach of theory what we need to know that allows us to interpret our own language. A theory of translation must read some sort of structure into sentences, but there is no reason to expect that it will provide any insight into how the meanings of sentences depend on their structure.’⁵ There is, of course, some translational process in all linguistic interpretation. It is a matter of finding familiar words for foreign phrases. So it is not that translation is irrelevant to interpretation or to understanding. It is just that it is not enough. Davidson’s suggestion is that a theory of translation is indeed a translation manual of sorts, but it is also something more – it must provide translations that give us insight into the structure of the foreign tongue. Thus he claims that a theory of interpretation is best seen as

the result of a merger between a structurally revealing theory of interpretation for a known language, and a system of translation from the unknown language into the known. The merger makes all reference to the known language otiose; when this reference is dropped, what is left is a structurally revealing theory of interpretation for the object language – couched, of course, in familiar words.⁶

While Davidson rejects the notion that a translation manual can be adequate to provide a theory of meaning, he nevertheless conceives of understanding as operating by way of an essentially translational process – ‘interpretation is essentially translation.’⁷ Thus a theory of interpretation takes the basic form of a theory of translation (a theory of translation that translates into a language whose structure we already understand). One might add, moreover, that although not every translation manual will yield a theory of interpretation for the individual interpreter, every translation manual could be employed, by some interpreter, as a theory that would yield understanding of the utterances it translates. All that is required is that the translation theory be in a language whose structure is understood by the interpreter. This particular instance of the dependence of translation on understanding is, of course, indicative of the more general dependence of translation on interpretation. Translation, as we shall see shortly, can never be undertaken independently of the more general project of understanding speakers. Translation is always part of a larger holistic enterprise. In this sense, then, every translation is also an interpretation insofar as it presupposes a prior interpretative background.⁸

In ‘Radical Interpretation’ Davidson says that his rejection of the notion of a translation manual as adequate for interpretation ‘is not a criticism of any doctrine of Quine’s.’⁹ For, as Davidson himself points out, ‘Quine did not intend to answer the questions I have set.’¹⁰ Unlike Quine, Davidson’s questions concern the development of a theory of interpretation that does the job of providing a theory of meaning and so it is semantics that is Davidson’s primary concern. The questions Quine sets himself, however, are not semantical, but epistemological – Quine aims to develop a ‘naturalized epistemology’. With an eye to the epistemological and metaphysical consequences that nevertheless flow from Davidson’s radical interpretation, one might say that, while Quine goes from epistemology to the problems of translation and interpretation, Davidson begins with interpretation, and goes from there to the problems of epistemology.

2.1.2 Tarski, truth and meaning

Davidson's primary insight, and his major contribution to semantic theory, has been in adapting a Tarskian theory of truth to the problem of developing a theory of meaning for natural languages. As Quine says:

That meaning and truth were somehow closely related was evident before Russell's eponymous Inquiry and after, but it was left to Davidson to recognize Tarski's theory of truth as the very structure of a theory of meaning. This insight was a major advance in semantics. Tarski had indeed called his theory of truth a study in semantics, but one felt constrained to add that it was semantics only in a broad sense, belonging more specifically to the theory of reference and not to the theory of meaning. That constraint now lapses.¹¹

Tarski's theory of truth¹² was originally intended, not as a general account of the nature of truth, but as a way of defining the truth-predicate as it applies within formal languages. The theory depends on the idea that the truth of a sentence is a function of the truth of the components of that sentence. Truth is thus defined *recursively* (the definition of truth for primitive expressions provides the basis for defining truth for more complex expressions),¹³ such that an infinity of so-called 'T-sentences' of the form (T) 'The sentences of language L is true if and only if p', can be generated for each sentence in the object language (the language the theory is a theory of). Each T-sentence pairs a sentence in the object language with a corresponding sentence in the meta-language (the language in which the theory is given), a sentence that is its translation. So in (I) above, 's' names a sentence in the object language L and 'p' is a translation of that sentence into the metalanguage. The sentence of the object language is thus mentioned, on the left-hand side, while the sentence of the metalanguage is used on the right-hand side.¹⁴ The translation of the object language sentence into the metalanguage provides a specification of the truth conditions for that sentence. Tarski's famous 'Convention T' is just the requirement that, for any sentence in the object language, the theory should recursively generate a corresponding T-sentence of the form (T). Such a theory will not, of course, provide a definition of truth simpliciter, but a definition of truth-in-L, that is, a definition of truth as it applies within the object language.

Providing a truth definition as envisaged by Tarski is relatively unproblematic where whole sentences are concerned. Where the primitive components of a language are not whole sentences, however, but parts of sentences, providing a truth definition is more of a problem. This is because the truth-predicate cannot properly be attached to anything less than whole sentences. "'Snow' is true', for instance, makes no

real sense. What is needed is, as Tarski himself says, 'a more general concept that is applicable to any sentential function'¹⁵ and this role is filled by the technical notion of satisfaction. Thus Tarski's strategy is to axiomatically define a notion – satisfaction – that stands to predicates and other sentential functions as truth stands to whole sentences. Satisfaction is a relation between sentential functions and sequences of objects. Tarski's definition of truth shows how the truth of whole sentences is determined by sentential functions being satisfied, or not satisfied, by such sequences.¹⁶

Tarski, of course, was interested in truth rather than meaning. Indeed, Tarski assumes meaning to get at truth, for one of the constraints on Tsentences is that the sentence on the right-hand side should be a translation of the sentence on the left. Davidson inverts Tarski, using truth to get at meaning. This is a point Davidson himself makes. In the 'Introduction' to Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation he writes:

One thing that only gradually dawned on me was that while Tarski intended to analyse the concept of truth by appealing (in Convention T) to the concept of meaning (in the guise of sameness of meaning, or translation), I have the reverse in mind. I considered truth to be the central primitive concept, and hoped by detailing truth's structure, to get at meaning. These are remarks about theories of truth, of course, not remarks to be found in them.¹⁷

Yet why use truth to get at meaning? It seems obvious that what we want a theory of meaning to do is to generate theorems (propositions that can be validly deduced from the initial axioms of the system) that match up sentences with their meanings – theorems that take the form 'S means that p'. Yet obvious though this may seem, it nevertheless presents a problem: the 'means that' locution is not a promising candidate for formalization. It is, apart from anything else, an inherently ambiguous phrase – it does not admit of a single, clear, unequivocal interpretation. More importantly, however, it also introduces an intensional element that is just what we want our theory of meaning to provide an account of, rather than to presuppose. In other words, it presupposes an understanding of the notion of 'sameness of meaning' when it is precisely that notion we want our theory to elucidate. What we need is a theory that will somehow match up sentences in the object language with sentences in the metalanguage in such a way that the metalanguage sentences 'give the meanings' of the object language sentences (along the lines of the original 'S means that p' – "la neige est blanche" means that snow is white'), but that does this without having recourse to any prior intensional notions. What we want, in other words, are clearly translations

from the object to the metalanguage. But how are we to provide translations without relying on the notion of sameness of meaning?

The problem seems to be finding the right filling to replace the troublesome 'means that' in the schema 's means that p' above. Davidson's proposal is that we replace 'means that' with 'is T if and only if'.¹⁸ The result is 's is true if and only if p'. What we are after in translation are, of course, equivalences between sentences. It is for this reason that Davidson uses the biconditional here – the 'if and only if'. The biconditional ensures that the sentence on the right-hand side will be equivalent in truth-value to the sentence named on the left-hand side. The biconditional is therefore interpreted materially, that is, in terms of an equivalence of truth-values. This is necessary to avoid the intrusion of intensional notions – it was the intrusion of such notions that caused the problem with the original 'means that' locution. But we obviously need some predicate to complete the left-hand side of the schema. The sentence 's if and only if p' is no different in this respect to the sentence 'Fred if and only if snow is white'. (The sentence on the left-hand side, remember, is mentioned – or 'named' rather than used.) Such sentences clearly make little sense, and they are hardly acceptable as well-formed. But here the disquotational aspect of the truth-predicate comes into play. Adding the predicate 'is true' to a declaratory sentence is to do nothing more than assert the truth of that sentence. Thus "'snow is white" is true' is extensionally equivalent to the sentence 'snow is white'. Adding the predicate 'is true' is, we might say, semantically redundant. In this respect the truth-predicate seems the obvious choice to complete the scheme. Moreover, the use of the truth-predicate also fits with the common intuition that the meaning of a sentence can be given by specifying the truth conditions of that sentence.

Yet, of course, Davidson does not merely suggest the use of the truth predicate here. The schema 'S is T if and only if p' requires a formal interpretation. And here Tarski's definition of truth is the obvious place to turn. So Davidson claims that the predicate 'is T' should be understood as constrained by Tarski's Convention T, since a Tarskian truth definition for a language provides a formal account of the necessary and sufficient conditions under which each sentence of the language is true.¹⁹ It provides, indeed, a recursive account of truth for a language such that, from a finite base, we can generate truth-conditions for a potential infinity of sentences.²⁰ Given the idea that meanings are best understood in terms of truth conditions, it is clear that the Tarskian account provides a means of generating translations between

sentences in the object language and sentences in the metalanguage. So Davidson claims that, once we arrive at the new schema ('s is T if and only if p'), we can see that the constraints that must be satisfied by the schema are just the constraints that must be satisfied by a Tarskian T-sentence. Our theory of meaning is exhibited as taking the form of a Tarski-like truth theory.²¹

Nevertheless, Davidson's own comments in support of the Tarskian interpretation still leave the crucial connection between meaning and truth (or between meaning and truth conditions) somewhat obscure. John McDowell, however, has discussed this connection further within the framework of an account that remains broadly Davidsonian in its orientation. McDowell begins with a claim about what it is that a theory of meaning or sense is supposed to do:

The job of a theory of sense should be to fix the content of speech-acts which a total theory of the language concerned would warrant ascribing to speakers ... in the case of any sentence whose utterance command of the language would make fully comprehensible as a saying – any indicative sentence – a theory of sense must fix the content of the saying which an intentional utterance of the sentence could be understood to be.²²

McDowell suggests (and Davidson would agree) that a theory of meaning should be seen as part of an overall theory of understanding for speakers, a theory encompassing the linguistic and non-linguistic behavior of speakers, as well as their attitudes and environment. The theory would be tested by its adequacy in describing those actions of speakers that constitute speech-acts in the language. It would have to describe them in such a way that those items of behavior could generally be seen to be intelligible in the light of the speakers' attitudes. Those attitudes would in turn have to make sense in the light of the speakers' behavior (linguistic and non-linguistic) and environment.

McDowell's account remains in the spirit of the original Davidsonian proposal. Indeed, McDowell's account of how the adequacy of a theory of meaning is to be tested is based, in essence, on what we have already come to know as the interdependence of meaning and information (or belief). It is based on what I shall be calling, in subsequent chapters, the thesis of psychological holism: the idea that the psychological realm, which includes belief, meaning and action, is constituted holistically and must be understood as such. Not only is the testing of a theory of meaning based on such a holistic assumption, but

that assumption is built in to the method by which such a theory is constructed. Indeed, theory testing and theory construction are two sides of the same process.

If a theory of meaning is to be tested by its performance in the context of an overall theory of interpretation for a speaker or speakers, then truth will necessarily enter in. For what we are involved in doing is explaining utterances by reference to certain features of the speaker and her situation. In its crudest form, we pair up a sentence uttered by a speaker with some aspect of her circumstances, that is, with some true statement that describes her situation. There are, of course, various constraints on how we do this, but the main point is that this 'interpretation' of a speaker's utterance should, once it is seen in the light of the speaker's overall attitudinal system and her overall behavior, make the original utterance intelligible. In interpreting the speaker what we have done is, of course, to 'translate' her utterance by correlating the utterance with something the speaker holds true. In effect, we have used truth to get at meaning. This is the original Davidsonian insight; an insight that will be an important element in the discussion in succeeding pages.²³ It is an insight into an aspect of the holistic structure of the mental, or more generally, of the psychological.

As Quine says, it is Davidson who has brought home to us the close connection between truth and meaning. Davidson's aim has been to use this connection to develop a theory of meaning. Truth is the key to an account of meaning. Davidson could, indeed, be said to have focused attention on, what he calls, 'the centrality of truth in the understanding of language.'²⁴ In this respect Davidson's work is an investigation of meaning from the perspective of truth. However, since meaning and truth are so intimately related, Davidson's work must be seen as an investigation of truth no less than of meaning. This is surely implied in his comment (quoted earlier) that '[I] hoped, by detailing truth's structure, to get at meaning'. The investigation of truth must be, at the same time, an investigation of meaning, since the structure of meaning mirrors the structure of truth. The two are illuminated together.²⁵

The task of showing precisely how to turn a theory of truth into a theory of meaning is not a simple project, nor is it uncontroversial.²⁶ The detailed elaboration and defense of Davidson's semantic theory in its formal aspects is not, however, something I shall attempt here, for the formal semantic theory is not my primary concern. My interest is in the wider aspects of Davidson's work, namely, his holistic approach to interpretation and the more general epistemological and metaphysical implications of this

holism. So this book is more about Davidsonian holism than Davidsonian semantic theory. For my purposes, the crucial feature of Davidson's approach to semantics is the way in which it connects truth with meaning. It is that connection which is significant here much more than the technical details of the way the connection is worked out – even more than the details of the Tarskian model around which Davidsonian semantics is built. But, if that holistic connection is central to my present project, then it is also central to Davidson's own enterprise. Davidson's endeavors in the theory of meaning properly make sense only when they are seen as based on an implicitly holistic premise: on the interdependence of meaning with truth, and on the interdependence of meaning with belief.

Of course, in terms of the historical development of Davidson's ideas, holism might seem to be one of the conclusions of Davidson's work rather than its premise. My suggestion is that, to adapt an old adage, what is first in the order of publication is not always first in the proper order of understanding. The reasons for the adoption of the Tarskian interpretation of 'is T' are not obvious in Davidson's original formulation of the proposal. But once one recognizes the holistic nature of the interpretative project, the interconnection of truth and meaning is self-evident. Indeed, McDowell's argument for using truth to get at meaning takes just this line: it moves from recognition of the holism of interpretation to the further recognition of the role of truth in interpretation. So my suggestion is that, in a sense, Davidson has to be read backwards.²⁷

The idea that interpretation is a holistic process – an idea developed through the account of radical interpretation – is the real basis for the Davidsonian account of the nature of a semantic theory. Perhaps this idea can be read into Davidson's comment that 'Convention T, even when bent to fit the awkward shapes of natural language points the way to a radical theory of interpretation.'²⁸ A similar point may also be applicable to the connection between Davidson's views on language and his views on the mind. It seems often to be assumed that Davidson's views on language arise out of his views about the anomalous nature of the mental.²⁹ In fact, Davidson's theory of mind, as well as his theory of meaning, ought really to be seen as arising out of his holistic approach to interpretation, and not *vice versa*.³⁰

It is because I read Davidson's work in this way – and so place the thesis of holism at the centre (a thesis that I must admit will not be properly elaborated until chapter three) – that I am less concerned to deal with the various formal objections to Davidson's work. The Tarskian account certainly illustrates in a

formal fashion, and even makes use of, one aspect of Davidsonian holism – the connection between truth and meaning. But as it is the thesis of holism itself that is central to my account here, so the crucial battles for me are not battles to defend the formal technicalities of Davidson’s approach. Instead, the battle is for the defense and further elaboration of the idea of holism itself – a battle that is joined in chapters three and four. So if I seem not to provide a detailed defense of the Davidsonian programme at the formal level – at the level of the details of Davidsonian semantic theory – that is because, so far as the wider issue of Davidsonian holism is concerned, I do not believe that is where the real action is to be found.

Of course, the fact that I am not concerned to defend or develop the more formal aspects of the Davidsonian approach does not mean that I will happily abandon Davidson’s holistic approach to semantic theory. The adherence to such an approach can be viewed as an aspect of the adoption of the more general holism elaborated here. I will, in this respect, be committed to the defense of an overall holism in semantics, just as I am committed to the defense of holism in psychology, and in the theory of understanding. Questions of meaning, truth and reference will thus arise throughout the discussion in the following pages, and rival views in semantics will be dealt with in the course of developing the idea of holism itself. One of the persistent themes will be that meaning (along with other central notions such as truth) cannot be understood reductively or atomistically. That is, meaning cannot be understood by being reduced to some other notion such as that of speakers’ intentions (the Gricean strategy³¹) or to reference (the strategy espoused by such as Devitt³²), nor can the meanings of words be understood in isolation from whole sentences, or sentences in isolation from a language, a speaker, a community or a world. This rejection of both reductionism and atomism with respect to meaning is, of course, a consequence of Davidson’s holistic approach by which meaning must be understood, not by being reduced to other notions, but in terms of its interconnection with other notions – we aim to ‘understand semantic concepts in the light of others.’³³

2.2 The project of radical interpretation

2.2.1 Interdependence and indeterminacy

There are, in Davidson, two important pairings of concepts, both involving meaning. Later it shall become evident that these two pairings are not really two couples at all, but instead form a holistic triad. For the moment, however, I will keep them, to some extent, distinct. The first of these is the pairing of truth with meaning; the second is the pairing of meaning with belief. As these two conceptual couples are basic to the Davidsonian approach, so it is evident that Davidson's approach to the task of developing a theory of meaning is effectively one that marries Tarski and Quine – it joins together the truth-meaning pair we find in Tarski with the meaning-belief (or meaning-information) pair from Quine.³⁴ The possible deficiencies in trying to base a theory of meaning on Tarski alone are consequently overcome through Davidson's embedding of Tarski within a broadly Quinean framework.³⁵

While the last section dealt with the Tarskian pairing of truth with meaning, the focus of this section will be the pairing of meaning with belief that derives from Quine. In Davidson that pairing appears as the interdependence of meaning and belief (in Quine as the inseparability of meaning and information). This idea is tied to the notion of the interdependent character of the propositional attitudes (a descendant of Quine's epistemic holism), and is the crucial idea in the setting up of the scenario of radical interpretation.

What we need, in interpreting a language, is essentially a theory of meaning for that language. The connection of truth with meaning suggests the form such a theory should take – it should be a Tarski-like truth theory. The reason for employing Tarski is twofold: first, the Tarskian account ties truth and meaning together; second, since it is a recursive account, it provides a way of defining complex expressions on the basis of primitive ones, thereby enabling us to deal with a potential infinity of utterances. It is useful to keep in mind the idea that the theory will be a Tarski-like theory. Not only is the theory that we want here a theory of meaning and not of truth (Tarski's was a theory of truth), but, as Tarski himself points out, there is no precise solution to the problem of defining truth for natural languages, since natural languages lack a clearly defined structure:

The problem of the definition of truth obtains a precise meaning and can be solved in a rigorous way only for those languages whose structure has been exactly specified. For other languages – thus, for all natural, ‘spoken’ languages – the meaning of the problem is more or less vague, and its solution can have only an approximate character [italics in the original].³⁶

Perhaps we should say, adapting Tarski’s own turn of phrase, that the theory we are after will at least ‘approximate’ to a Tarskian truth theory.³⁷ In fact, Davidson himself acknowledges this point, noting that ‘A theory of truth for a natural language (as I conceive it) differs widely in both aim and interest from Tarski’s truth definitions. Sharpness of application is lost ... Satisfaction of Tarski’s Convention T remains a desideratum of a theory but is no longer available as a formal test.’³⁸ We cannot, then, expect the formal Tarskian constraints to have the same precise application to natural languages as formal languages allow, if only because natural languages do not present clearly defined, axiomatic systems. Tarski thus provides us with a model for a theory of meaning, but not a model that we can expect to emulate in any exact fashion and so, in spite of the fact that some of Davidson’s early discussions might seem to suggest otherwise, we cannot treat interpretation as a matter simply of developing a Tarski-style truth theory that can then be applied in some mechanical fashion to yield understanding. Indeed, in ‘A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs’, Davidson explicitly rejects just this idea, emphasizing the impossibility of arriving at any strictly formal and systematic theory of interpretation that will also be adequate to the actual behavior of speakers.³⁹ Davidson’s rejection of a purely formalized approach (a rejection that does not affect his insistence on a Tarski-style structure as the basis for a theory of interpretation, even if that structure must be somewhat relaxed) is itself closely connected with the Davidsonian rejection of convention as having any central role in understanding.⁴⁰

The difficulties of developing a theory of meaning for natural language modeled on Tarski’s theory of truth are not, however, merely difficulties arising from the ‘inexactness’ that accompanies natural language. There are a number of problems facing any attempt to develop such a theory. One concerns where the process of theory formation might begin – the Davidson solution, as we shall see below, is to assume that we initially identify instances of ‘holding true’ on the part of our interlocutors. Another concerns the apparent need for certain empirical constraints in addition to the formal constraints imposed by the Tarskian framework. An equivalence of truth-values between two sentences will not always ensure

that we have an accurate translation. The French sentence 'La neige est blanche' will always have the same truth-value as the English sentence 'snow is white, and bachelors are unmarried men'. Yet the latter sentence is clearly not a good translation of the former. We might try to resolve the apparent problem here by looking to a set of empirical constraints additional to those supplied by Tarski,⁴¹ As Bjørn Ramberg points out, however, the anomalies that are used to argue for such additional constraints typically depend on a static conception of the process of radical interpretation. So long as we realize that the process of developing a theory of interpretation is a dynamic process in which we are always looking to test our theory against new evidence, anomalies such as that discussed above need not worry us unduly.⁴² Indeed, the basic problem at issue here can be taken already to have been anticipated by Davidson's requirement that T-sentences must be understood as theorems generated by a theory of meaning that is adequate to the language in question as a whole.⁴³ A sentence such as "La neige est blanche" is true iff snow is white and bachelors are unmarried men' is unlikely to satisfy this requirement, since it is unlikely that such a sentence will be compatible with any theory that is adequate to the component parts of that sentence.

Whether or not we need to add a set of empirical constraints to the constraints already provided by Tarski, and on this matter I think Ramberg is correct in saying that no such constraints are needed, it is nevertheless true that a theory of meaning for a natural language will be an empirical theory and as such will be a theory about the linguistic behavior of actual speakers. What sets the scene for the actual task of constructing and testing such a theory is the interconnection of meaning with belief. This interdependence suggests a problem, but it also makes possible a solution. An important element in that solution is the principle of charity, and, while, in Quine, the principle may appear as a rather ad hoc device, in Davidson it can be seen to derive from the interdependence of meaning and belief itself.

The interdependence of meaning and belief is, of course, something we have already met with in Quine under the name of the inseparability of meaning and information. That the Quinean inseparability of meaning and information, and the Davidsonian interdependence of meaning and belief, do, in fact, embody the same basic idea has been implicitly acknowledged by Quine in commenting on Davidson's work. Quine writes: 'The problem of separating meaning from belief is one that struck me as very central. I've felt there is no hope, in general, of separating community wide beliefs into truths that belong to the meaning of words and truths that one would like to think of as universally shared collateral information.'⁴⁴ Yet while,

in Quine, the connection of meaning with belief is not an explicit theme, in Davidson it properly comes to occupy center-stage.

According to Davidson, meaning and belief cannot be clearly separated from one another. The reason for this is that it is impossible to determine what beliefs speakers have without also being able to interpret their utterances, but it is impossible to interpret utterances without being able to identify beliefs. Moreover, how specific utterances are interpreted, and what beliefs are attributed in particular cases, will each depend both on what theory of meaning and on what theory of belief (in the sense of a theory of belief content) we employ. In 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning' Davidson illustrates this interdependence by an analogy with decision theory: 'Broadly stated, my theme is that we should think of meanings and beliefs as interrelated constructs of a single theory just as we already view subjective values and probabilities as interrelated constructs of decision theory.'⁴⁵ The interrelation between belief and meaning can be seen as a consequence of Davidson's fundamentally holistic conception of belief. For Davidson inherits from Quine the idea that beliefs form an interconnected network. Beliefs, says Davidson, are 'identified and described only within a dense pattern of other beliefs.'⁴⁶ Moreover, beliefs are what utterances are paradigmatically expressive of. Thus the meaning of an utterance is dependent upon the beliefs of the speaker simply in virtue of the fact that the utterance expresses (or is, at the very least, a consequence of) some belief that the speaker holds. Equally, the beliefs attributed to a speaker depend on the interpretations given to the speaker's utterances for the very same reason.

The interdependence of belief with meaning is associated with an indeterminacy in interpretation akin to the Quinean indeterminacy of translation. As Davidson comments:

It would be a mistake to suppose that we somehow could first determine what a speaker believes, wants, hopes for, intends, and fears and then go on to a definite answer to the question what his words refer to. For the evidence on which all these matters depend gives us no way of separating out the contributions of thought, action, desire and meaning one by one. Total theories are what we must construct, and many theories will do equally well.⁴⁷

Unlike Quine, however, Davidson applies charity quite generally, and this, in combination with the additional constraints that result from Davidson's adoption of Tarski (including the assumption of first

order logic), mean that the indeterminacy of interpretation is unlikely to be as great as the indeterminacy of translation that is evident in Quine.⁴⁸

Davidson does not only argue, however, that indeterminacy is lessened on his account, he also claims that 'the question of indeterminacy is not central'.⁴⁹ Thus he comments that:

Indeterminacy of meaning or translation does not represent a failure to capture significant distinctions; it marks the fact that certain apparent distinctions are not significant. If there is indeterminacy, it is because when all the evidence is in, alternative ways of stating the facts remain open. An analogy from decision theory has already been noted: if the numbers (1), (2) and (3) capture the meaningful relations in subjective values between three alternatives, then the numbers (-7), (-2) and (+13) do as well. Indeterminacy of this kind cannot be of genuine concern.⁵⁰

Elsewhere Davidson has illustrated the indeterminacy thesis by reference to the difference between different scales of measurement (of temperature, weight and so forth).⁵¹ Davidson's use of these examples is highly instructive, particularly inasmuch as they indicate a difference between the Davidsonian and Quinean accounts of indeterminacy. Quinean indeterminacy is such that, when it comes to translation, there is no 'fact of the matter,' and, in this respect, Quine sees a clear contrast, as we saw earlier, between the indeterminacy of translation and the under-determination of theory by evidence that obtains in physical theory. When it comes to interpretation, however, Davidson rejects the Quinean claim that there is no fact of the matter at issue.⁵² While acknowledging that he has not always been clear in regard to the issue of indeterminacy, he writes that:

Indeterminacy occurs whenever a vocabulary is rich enough to describe a phenomenon in more than one way. It doesn't matter whether you say Sam is to the left of Susan, or that Susan is to the right of Sam. If you have the axioms that define some system of measurement, whether of weight, temperature, or subjective probability, you can represent the structures so defined in numbers in endless ways. What matters is what is invariant. With weight, an arbitrarily chosen positive number is assigned to some particular object; relative to that assignment, the numbers that measure the weights of all other objects are fixed. You get an equally good way of keeping track of weights by multiplying the original figures by any positive constant; it's the ratios that are invariant. Invariances are 'facts of the matter'.⁵³

On this account what is indeterminate is the particular assignment of terms that are used to map a system of relations or ratios. What is determinate are the relations or ratios themselves that are described using that particular assignment of terms. Indeed, this must be so if there is to be any sense to there being correct or incorrect ways in which those relations or ratios can be described – and Davidson has always emphasized that indeterminacy does not mean that there is no correct interpretation, but only that there is no unique interpretation.

Interpretation is indeterminate whenever there is more than one correct way of describing the object of interpretation. Such indeterminacy does not apply merely to descriptions of beliefs and desires, utterances and actions, but to anything that can be described. As Davidson is fond of pointing out in other contexts, with respect to any particular, there are always many logically independent descriptions that are true of it. Thus, the description ‘the first Post-Master General of the United States’ and ‘the inventor of bifocals’ are both independently true descriptions of the man also known as Benjamin Franklin. Indeterminacy in this broad sense – which may also be thought of as involving something like a principle of the multiplicity of description: ‘if there is one true description of any phenomenon, then there will be many true descriptions’ – plays a crucial role in Davidson’s work at many different points. It is operative in his analysis of action, through the idea of action ‘under a description’, as well as in his account of the methodology of interpretation, according to which two speakers can relate to the same object even though they each describe the object differently.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding Davidson’s comments in the passage quoted above, it would, however, be incorrect to suppose that the indeterminacy that concerns us in respect of interpretation is nothing more than a matter of our being able to describe a phenomenon ‘in more than one way’. So far as the indeterminacy of interpretation is concerned, what is at issue is not merely the availability of alternative descriptions or interpretations, but rather the interdependent character of belief and meaning, such that with respect to any particular speaker or group of speakers who can be interpreted, there will always be more than one theory that will be adequate to that interpretation. Whereas indeterminacy in the broad sense, then, is simply a matter of the availability of multiple correct descriptions, in the more specific sense associated with interpretation, it consists in the idea that there will always be more than one way of attributing beliefs and assigning meanings.⁵⁵

The connection of meaning with belief, and the bearing it has on problems of interpretation – including the indeterminacy with which it is, even if indirectly, associated – becomes evident when we ask what evidence is available to the radical interpreter, on the basis of which she can formulate a theory of interpretation. Davidson claims that the evidence cannot include any detailed descriptions of a speaker's attitudes or beliefs. The reason for this is that we make ascriptions of belief largely on the basis of our interpretation of a speaker's utterances, yet it is the interpretation of utterances that our theory of interpretation aims to provide. Speakers' attitudes cannot be part of the evidential base for interpretation, since the identification of attitudes is part of what a theory of interpretation should make possible:

A speaker who holds a sentence to be true on an occasion does so in part because of what he means or would mean, by an utterance of that sentence, and in part because of what he believes. If all we have to go on is the fact of honest utterance, we cannot infer the belief without knowing the meaning, and have no chance of inferring the meaning without the belief.⁵⁶

Here Davidson simply restates the interdependence of meaning and belief, but restates it in such a way that it can now be seen as setting the essential problem of radical interpretation, and also as constraining the solution: 'Since we cannot hope to interpret linguistic activity without knowing what a speaker believes and cannot found a theory of what he means on a prior discovery of his beliefs and intentions, I conclude that in interpreting utterances from scratch – in radical interpretation – we must somehow deliver simultaneously a theory of belief and a theory of meaning.'⁵⁷ To repeat Davidson's earlier words, 'total theories are what we must construct'. We must have theories that encompass both meaning and belief, and, if we are to be absolutely correct here, not just these two, for desire is as much implicated as is either belief or meaning. What someone means by an utterance depends not only on what she believes, but also on what she intends, and what she intends will depend on what she desires. The implication of desire here follows directly from our adoption of the holistic approach that conceives of a speaker's behavior and attitudes as a single interconnected and interdependent system. That desire should be so included has perhaps not always been clear in Davidson's work, but is something that he now explicitly recognizes. As he writes: 'I now think it is essential in doing radical interpretation, to include the desires of the speaker right from the start, so that the springs of action and intention, namely both belief and desire, are related to meaning.'⁵⁸

In effect, then, a theory of interpretation must be a theory for the understanding of persons, that is, of creatures conceived as embodying a holistic system of beliefs and desires. As a theory of persons, such a theory must also be explanatory of their behavior as a whole, including, as we saw earlier, both linguistic and extra-linguistic behavior. Now one could say that this is so partly because the understanding of meaning only has any practical point in the context of the understanding of behavior, but, more fundamentally, it is because of the impossibility of separating out a theory of desire or of action from a theory of belief or a theory of meaning. Moreover, not only is it the case that we need 'total' theories here, but the evidence against which such theories must be measured itself forms a totality. Our theories of interpretation must be tested against the totality of behavioral and other evidence, for there is no way in which we could even begin to sort through the evidence independently of some theory of interpretation. The evidence is itself constituted by the theory of interpretation we employ. It becomes a matter of testing 'total' theories against 'total' evidence.⁵⁹

This was not so for Quine, since for him the notion of stimulus meaning offered some shreds of independent empirical evidence on which to base the development of a theory of translation. On the Quinean account certain utterances were seen to have a more direct relationship with the world than others. The notion of stimulus meaning, however, is something for which Davidson 'can find no use' or, at least, he cannot make enough sense of the distinction between theoretical and observational sentences that lies behind it.⁶⁰ He cannot do this because, unlike Quine, Davidson recognizes that the interdependence of meaning and belief is universal. It infects all our beliefs and all our utterances such that there can be no firm ground that lies outside of interpretation to which independent appeal could be made. In the case of stimulus meaning, for instance, how are we to determine when the stimulus meaning for two utterances is the same, without, that is, assuming beliefs about what is 'the same'? Later we shall see how Davidson himself castigates Quine for implicitly holding on to the idea that there is some determinacy possible in respect of meanings and beliefs, provided we make the appropriate relativization. Yet we do not need to go even this far for evidence of Quine's inconsistency on the question of determinacy of meaning. The notion of stimulus meaning seems clearly to presuppose that we can find some determinacy in the translational game. It is, however, a determinacy that simply is not there to be found; a determinacy that the interdependence of meaning and belief will not allow.

In this respect Davidson's holism is much more thoroughgoing than Quine's, and this marks a crucial, perhaps the crucial, point of difference between them. Still, it is a difference easily overlooked, and it can seem as if Davidson takes on the idea of Quinean epistemic holism in an almost unchanged form. Moreover, Davidson seems never to explicitly make the connection between his holistic approach to belief, and the thesis of the interdependence of meaning and belief. That there is such a connection should, by now, be quite clear. Once that connection is made, it also becomes very clear how much Davidsonian holism differs from its Quinean counterpart.

Quine conceives of his holism almost purely epistemically. It arises out of the consideration of the relation of theory to experience. Similarly, his account of the project of translation is also fairly narrowly conceived. With Davidson, the inclusion of desire in the picture, and the broadening of the notion of the inseparability of meaning and information into the interdependence of meaning and belief, bring about a transformation of the project of translation. The horizons of translation become much wider. No longer is it just a matter of making connections between stimulations and behavior, but of connecting utterances with beliefs held true, and of making overall sense of speakers' attitudes, actions and utterances. Talk of interpretation rather than translation is a mark of this broadening in conception as much as of a more 'semantic emphasis'. For these reasons, it seems appropriate to talk of a shift from the narrower epistemic holism of Quine to a broader, more encompassing holism in Davidson. The latter involves both the interdependence of meaning with belief, and with other attitudes, as well as the interdependence that obtains between attitudes (a matter that will be discussed further below).

The holistic nature of belief and desire, and of their relation to meaning, would seem to suggest no point at which interpretation could begin. We must deliver a theory of belief and desire, and a theory of meaning, at one blow, and on the face of it this might seem a pretty tall order. As it turns out, although no one element in our overall interpretation turns out to be prior to anything else, Davidson's suggestion is that we do not need to deliver all of it, in any completed form, at once. The place where we begin proves to be a totally revisable starting point – revisable in the light of the interpretation that it also enables.

2.2.2 The methodology of radical interpretation

So what is the recommended Davidsonian strategy in interpretation? To start with, Davidson suggests that the radical interpreter should be able to identify those occasions on which a speaker holds sentences to be true. He writes:

I suggest, following Quine, that we may without circularity or unwarranted assumptions accept certain very general attitudes towards sentences as the basic evidence for a theory of radical interpretation. For the sake of the present discussion at least we may depend on the attitude of accepting as true, directed to sentences, as the crucial notion. (A more full-blooded theory would look to other attitudes towards sentences as well, such as wishing true, wondering whether true, and so on.) Attitudes are indeed involved here, but the fact that the main issue is not begged can be seen from this: if we merely know that someone holds a certain sentence to be true, we know neither what he means by the sentence nor what belief his holding it true represents.⁶¹

Ordinarily there is no difficulty about being able to identify a speaker as holding a sentence true without being able to specify the content of that sentence. That we should be able to do so is an undisputable condition of the possibility of radical interpretation. What is less clear is the extent to which this can be done without some presupposition as to the beliefs and desires of the speaker. Interpreting a speaker as holding some unspecified belief true is surely dependent on other assessments of the speaker's beliefs and desires. Thus, it would seem doubtful to suppose that we can find any place to begin our interpretative project which is unaffected by the holistic nature of interpretation. Insofar as he assumes that we can do just this, Davidson is surely mistaken.⁶²

Yet, regardless of whether we can identify instances of holding true without some presupposition of the speaker's beliefs, being able to do this would not, as Davidson himself points out, resolve the problem set by the thesis of interpretative holism. The problem of interpreting meanings, and of identifying beliefs and desires, remains. However, if we accept that belief (and I mean to include other attitudes such as desire here) and meaning do interconnect, then, if we could hold one or the other of the pair constant, we could determine the other. Of course, the interdependence that is a part of Davidson's interpretative holism means that we can have no prior access to beliefs or meanings. Consequently, neither beliefs nor meanings can be determined with certainty at the outset. Davidson's solution is to suggest that we could begin interpretation by assuming beliefs, and, on that basis, develop a tentative theory of meaning. The resulting

theory of meaning could then be used to test our initial assumptions about beliefs and so lead on to a revised theory of belief that, in its turn, could be used to test our theory of meaning ... and so on, until an acceptable theory – a balance of meaning against belief – is reached. Using a Rawlsian turn of phrase we might call this a state of ‘interpretative’ equilibrium.⁶³ Echoing this idea of interpretation as a semantic-epistemic balancing act, Quine writes that: ‘Translating is not the recapturing of some determinate entity, a meaning, but only a balancing of various values.’⁶⁴

The methodology of interpretation Davidson recommends is thus one that involves a continual shuttling back and forth between the interpretation of meanings and identification of beliefs until some sort of equilibrium is reached (although such equilibrium will be only a staging post in the ongoing interpretative project⁶⁵). It is after all a single overall theory that we want here – a theory that includes a theory of meaning, a theory of desire and a theory of belief under the one theory of interpretation. Thus we play off different components of our overall theory one against the other, just as in the case of decision theory we play off values and probabilities to reach an optimum balance. The balance we reach is never final, however, since the indeterminacy of interpretation ensures that there will always be more than one way of achieving the desired balance, and there will always be additional evidence of which account must be taken. The equilibrium achieved in interpretation is a dynamic equilibrium. So Bjørn Ramberg writes that:

the radical-interpretation model must be understood as a model of a process, not as a model of a static state of linguistic competence. More precisely, we might say that semantic competence as modeled by radical interpretation is a process and so cannot be modeled by any one theory of truth. Talking as if any particular, more or less complete, theory of truth might represent a level of semantic competence might lead us to seriously misconstrue the nature of this competence, by ignoring the essentially dynamic character of semantic understanding.⁶⁶

The conception of the structure of interpretation as a dialogic process in which different elements are played off one against the other, and against an overall theory, is very reminiscent of the circularity of understanding that is a common theme in hermeneutic theory. The hermeneutic tradition is a long one, having its origins in the scriptural hermeneutics of Luther,⁶⁷ and it is a tradition that has provided the most comprehensive and sustained treatment of the problems of interpretation. Given their common concern

with problems of understanding and interpretation, one might hope that the hermeneutic and the Davidsonian projects would be mutually illuminating. As will become evident in subsequent chapters, this is indeed the case. It is my contention, in fact, that only by adopting a more hermeneutical approach can the Davidsonian project be properly developed and its full implications realized. Davidsonian radical interpretation implies a 'radical' hermeneutics. For the moment, however, it will be enough to point out the similarities between the dialogic structure of Davidsonian interpretation and the circularity of the hermeneutical.

That there are clear similarities here is evident from even the most cursory examination of hermeneutic theory. It is with Schleiermacher that modern hermeneutic theory, in many respects, begins. Understanding is, for Schleiermacher, inescapably circular, since it requires both an understanding of the context of interpretation as well as an understanding of the separate elements to be interpreted. Each, however, is dependent on the other. So our understanding of each element is dependent on our understanding of the overall context, while our understanding of the context is dependent on our understanding of the elements.⁶⁸ Such circularity is evident in the Davidsonian conception of radical interpretation, for our interpretation of each element – whether it be belief, desire or meaning – is dependent on, and sensitive to, our interpretation of the others. All interpretation takes place against an overall 'theory' that is itself a product of our interpretation of specific items of behavior and of our identification of specific attitudes.

Of course, we need some place from which to begin this interpretative dialogue, and it is, in effect, by the assumption of beliefs that we get such a place. We thus hold belief constant in order to get at meaning (and thence back to belief). What governs our initial assumptions about what speakers believe is a principle already familiar from Quinean radical translation – the principle of charity (also occasionally referred to, by Davidson, as the principle of 'rational accommodation'.⁶⁹) The role of charity is as a general constraining principle on our theory of interpretation. In its actual operation, however, it has two roles to play.⁷⁰

Charity operates, first, by providing a place to begin – it prescribes that we take the utterances of a speaker to be, generally speaking, true. As Davidson says 'we take the fact that speakers of a language hold a sentence to be true (under observed circumstances) as prima facie evidence that the sentence is true under

those circumstances.⁷¹ Of course, charity must involve more than just an assumption to the effect that a speaker is generally a speaker of truths. For any particular set of circumstances will be consistent with an infinity of truths. Only by assuming the beliefs and desires of a speaker can we determine what truths will be relevant to a speaker's utterances in a given situation. Thus charity prescribes that we assume the speaker to have similar beliefs and desires to ourselves.⁷² This assumption of similarity in belief is quite general, covering the whole range of beliefs, although in the first instance it is those beliefs that concern the speaker's immediate environment that are most relevant. That we must assume agreement in beliefs between ourselves and those we interpret can, in fact, be seen as deriving from the idea that we should maximize the truth of speakers' utterances. For what we are to count as a true utterance by a speaker, given that it is we who are the interpreters, can only be decided, in the first instance, by reference to our assessment of what is true, that is, by reference to what we believe to be true. So, if we take a speaker to be uttering a true sentence, we can generally take her to be expressing a belief that is in agreement with our own beliefs. We have already seen how truth and meaning are tied together within the theory and practice of interpretation: we interpret utterances by connecting those utterances with circumstances that actually obtain in the speaker's environment. Similarly, we have seen how meaning and belief are tied together in terms of their interdependence. What we can now see is that truth and belief are connected notions. So we cannot identify beliefs independently of what we hold to be true.⁷³

The reason for this connection between belief and truth is that beliefs can only be identified within a network of other beliefs. This carries with it the implication that identifying beliefs is, at least in part, a matter of connecting up beliefs with the objects of belief in the world. In this latter respect beliefs are identified in the same way that utterances are interpreted by considering the speaker or 'believer' in relation to her environment.⁷⁴ In the first instance, this means considering beliefs in relation to the immediate physical environment of the speaker. As interpretation proceeds, and as we are able to understand an increasing body of utterances through our grasp of the underlying linguistic structure of those utterances, we are able, through the interconnection between utterances and beliefs, and between beliefs and other beliefs (both ours and those of the speaker), to look to a more extended background against which interpretation can take place. Thus we are able to interpret more sophisticated utterances less directly tied to immediate environmental circumstances.⁷⁵ In all cases interpretation proceeds by connecting the speaker's

utterances (which express the beliefs of the speaker) with utterances that we ourselves understand and that we also hold true (utterances that therefore express our own beliefs).

The connection between truth and meaning is thus entwined with a parallel connection between truth and belief. It is, indeed, truth that connects both meaning and belief such that we can use our own beliefs (that which we hold true) in order to arrive at a theory of meaning for a speaker. (Here is the holistic triad of meaning, belief and truth that I mentioned above.) The need for agreement in order for interpretation to be possible is ultimately a matter of agreement on truths. Agreement and truth are inseparable given the holistic nature of interpretation. It is the combination of agreement and truth that makes interpretation possible in the first place. It might be thought that we could conceive of a theory that interpreted speakers to be uttering truths, but also attributed beliefs that could not be correlated with our beliefs in any straightforward way. However, that beliefs cannot be correlated or brought into agreement in a straightforward way does not mean that they cannot be correlated at all. Indeed, our being able to recognize certain beliefs as true must involve our being able to make some such correlation – our being able to find some overall agreement – for otherwise we could not interpret.

Yet here, as elsewhere, the assumption of agreement is only the first step in the interpretative process. It is where we begin and not where we end up. So charity can be seen as providing a constraint on where we may begin our interpretation, and it can also be seen as operating in a second way by setting limits on how far, and in what direction, our interpretation may proceed. Charity thus counsels us to avoid the attribution of too much in the way of error, or inconsistency, to a speaker:

The point is ... that widespread agreement is the background against which disputes and mistakes can be interpreted. Making sense of the utterances and behavior of others, even their most aberrant behavior, requires us to find a great deal of reason and truth in them. To see too much unreason on the part of others is simply to undermine our ability to understand what it is they are so unreasonable about. If the vast amount of agreement on plain matters that is assumed in communication escapes notice, it's because the shared truths are too many or too dull to bear mentioning. What we want to talk about is what's new, surprising, or disputed.⁷⁶

Both of these aspects of the principle of charity can, of course, be seen as deriving directly from the earlier Quinean use of the principle. Recall that Quine counsels the employment of charity with respect to

observation sentences, truth functions, the analytical hypotheses, and also as a general principle requiring us to be suspicious of attributing absurd or unintelligible beliefs to speakers. But, as I noted above, Davidson's more thoroughgoing holism leaves little room for the distinction between the observational and the theoretical, and, consequently, Davidsonian charity is much more far reaching than Quine's. Both are, nevertheless, equally suspicious of absurdity or unintelligibility. Thus Davidson agrees with Quine in insisting that our interpretation should maximize the consistency and intelligibility of speakers' utterances and beliefs. Indeed, widespread unintelligibility will threaten the very possibility of being able to understand speakers as making meaningful utterances and having beliefs.

2.2.3 From Charity to Triangulation

Although talk of charity largely disappears from Davidson's later writings, the basic considerations that underlie the principle do not – indeed, one might argue that these considerations have become even more significant as the structures that underlie the Davidsonian employment of charity have been elaborated into the structure of what Davidson calls 'triangulation'.⁷⁷ Triangulation originates as a term in the practice of surveying and is a means for the determination of relative position. It involves taking a sighting from each of two already known locations to a particular site or landmark whose location is to be determined – the point of intersection between the two sightings fixes the location in question. Davidson applies this basic model to the structure of interpretation, and more broadly, to the structure of our interaction with others and with the world. Davidson describes the structure at issue in terms of the way in which one creature is able to correlate its own responses to features of the physical environment with those other creatures through being able to correlate the responses of those other creatures to the same features of the environment. In 'The Second Person', Davidson illustrates the point at issue by way of an example in which we identify a child as responding to a particular object or stimuli, namely, a table

It is a form of triangulation: one line goes from the child in the direction of the table, one line goes from us in the direction of the table, and the third line goes between us and the child. Where the lines from child to table and us to table converge, 'the' stimulus is located. Given our view of child and world, we can pick out 'the' cause of the child's responses. It is the common cause of our response and the child's response.⁷⁸

The three-way inter-relation that is evident here between interpreter, 'speaker' (the child) and object (the table) leads Davidson to talk, more generally, of three 'varieties of knowledge' – knowledge of oneself, knowledge of others, knowledge of the world – that underlie understanding and interpretation and that are intertwined in such a way any one variety of knowledge necessarily implicates the other two.⁷⁹ Thus knowledge of self is dependent on knowledge of others and of the world; knowledge of others is dependent on knowledge of self and the world; knowledge of the world is dependent on knowledge of self and of others.

In fact, one can already discern the basic structure at issue here in the structure of radical interpretation itself. The radical interpreter is able to interpret utterances and identify beliefs only through locating the speaker or 'believer' in relation to her environment (which means identifying the worldly causes of the speaker's utterances and beliefs – the rabbit, for instance, that prompts the cry of 'Gavagai!'). But doing this also depends on our relation to that same environment. The process of constructing a theory of interpretation for a speaker is indeed a matter of playing off these different elements in a manner that can also be described through the model of triangulation. Indeed, whether we talk of triangulation or the balancing of meaning against belief, in each case the underlying idea is that we arrive at a final determination of meaning or content through the interplay between elements in a way that necessarily includes our own attitudes and behavior, those of the speaker, and the worldly context in which both are located. Since the entire process also depends on the interconnection between these elements, so the process also depends on the same commitment to overall consistency that is one of the explicit elements in charity, but which, in the structure of triangulation, can be seen as itself simply subsumed under the idea of interconnectedness and interdependence as such.

Davidson's introduction of the idea of triangulation does not, then, represent a break with or a significant modification of the basic structure already set out in the account of radical interpretation, but is instead a generalization and elaboration of that structure. Indeed, as the idea of triangulation has emerged as a significant element in Davidson's thinking, so too has Davidson also become much more explicit about the holism that is integral to his thought. In addition, he has come to connect that holism with a form of 'externalism' – a view according to which the objects of thought are to be identified with the external causes of those thoughts – that is already presaged in the account of radical interpretation and that also

comes to the fore in the idea of triangulation. Davidson has commented that it was Quine who first convinced him of the truth of externalism in the early 1950s (although he adds that he was unable to convince Quine). In this respect, however, we can see the externalism and holism that are evident in the structure of radical interpretation, and that are themselves closely interconnected, as both derivative of elements in the original Quinean account of radical translation. In Davidson, those Quinean elements are considerably extended and developed. In particular, the extension of Quine's original holism only becomes evident with the Davidsonian shift from translation to interpretation. The implications of this broader holism are far-reaching, but it is a holism that is nevertheless based in the original Quinean ideas of radical translation, the inseparability of meaning and information, and the indeterminacy of interpretation. Davidson develops those Quinean themes and yet still leaves a great deal unexplored. In particular, and notwithstanding even his more recent elaborations of his position, he leaves largely implicit the nature and extent of the holism that is so central to his account of radical interpretation. The task now is to provide a fuller account of that holism. And just as Davidson has been led far beyond his original starting point, so the task at issue here will take us beyond the confines of the original Davidsonian project of establishing the basis for a theory of meaning.

II. HOLISM AND INTERPRETATION

3. The idea of psychological holism

So far, in Part I, I have sketched out the Quinean background to the Davidsonian project, and, briefly, the nature of Davidsonian radical interpretation. At this point, however, Davidson recedes somewhat into the background of my discussion. For the aim of this central part of the book is to develop something that Davidson seems not to provide: an integrated account of the holistic structure that underlies the project of radical interpretation and is exemplified by it. Providing a fuller account of that holism is the essential prerequisite to the account of the epistemological and ontological implications of the Davidsonian position that is undertaken in Part III. The three chapters that make up Part II – chapters three, four and five – can thus be seen as picking up on, and developing, three principal Davidsonian themes: in chapter three, the interdependence of meaning and belief (what was, in Quine, the inseparability of meaning and information); in chapter four, the indeterminacy of interpretation (in Quine, the indeterminacy of translation); in chapter five, the principle of charity (and the associated idea of triangulation). Just as these three ideas, all of which appear in Quine, are taken up and reworked by Davidson, so too they undergo a further transformation – and elaboration – in the following pages.

3.1 Holism and the psychological

3.1.1 Constitutive and methodological holism

The interdependence of meaning and belief is a central idea in Davidson's account of radical interpretation. Such holism is not, however, peculiar to Davidsonian radical interpretation. Some form of 'methodological' holism is fairly commonplace in both the natural and the social sciences – it appears wherever there is a requirement that theories should address the entire body of available evidence, or where theoretical constraints apply to a body of data as a whole. Methodological holism is certainly an element in Davidson's approach, but it is not the only form in which holism appears there.¹ There is, in addition, a

form of holism that I shall call 'constitutive holism'. This is not a holism that constrains theory construction, but that constrains that which the theory is about. In this case it is a holism that constrains the psychological itself, insofar as the very objects of interpretation (beliefs, desires and so forth), as well as the evidence on which interpretation is based, are themselves holistically constrained. Davidsonian holism is thus both methodological (holism is a constraint on theories of interpretation) and constitutive (the psychological realm that is the subject of interpretation is itself holistically constituted). Much of the argument in favor of constitutive holism does, of course, derive from the necessity of methodological holism. For what becomes evident through a consideration of interpretation is that the holistic requirements that constrain interpretative methodology are constitutive of the psychological as such. This suggests, however, that the two theses are less clearly distinct than might, at first, be thought. Indeed, one could regard methodological holism in respect of interpretation as merely an instance of the holistic constitution of the psychological.

The constitutive thesis can be seen to follow, in one respect, from the fact that psychological attitudes are not independent of the connections that obtain between them. Indeed one cannot separate out any attitudinal content that is independent of the connections with other attitudes, for the content of an attitude is determined by its relations with other attitudes. And, while the interdependence of attitudes is something that becomes apparent only in the project of interpretation, such interdependence cannot be written off as a feature merely of the way we come to know attitudes – the interdependence between attitudes is a real feature of the psychological itself. The connection between my hope that I will get a raise next month, and my belief that a raise will mean more money to take home (all things being equal), is not merely a connection that obtains at the level of my knowledge of these two attitudes. The relation is a real relation obtaining between the attitudes themselves, or, better, between those attitudes as they figure within a complex of other related attitudes. The interdependence of attitudes, and of attitudes and behavior (for, as we saw in the discussion of Davidson and Quine above, behavior is also implicated here), must be features intrinsic to the psychological.

Moreover, insofar as holism is a constitutive thesis, so the various elements of the psychological – beliefs, desires, actions and so forth – are themselves constituted by the relations of interdependence that obtain between them. Thus beliefs and desires, for instance, are individuated in terms of their place within a

system of psychological connections – they cannot exist outside of such a system. This latter point has the consequence that the indeterminacy thesis, encountered in the discussion of both Quine and Davidson, cannot be simply a methodological or epistemological thesis. Indeterminacy can, in fact, be seen as having both a methodological aspect that mirrors the idea of methodological holism (there is always more than one acceptable way of interpreting the complex of utterances, behavior and attitudes), and also a more fundamental ontological or constitutive side to it that mirrors the thesis of constitutive holism (the complex of utterances, behavior and attitudes is itself intrinsically indeterminate).

The idea that attitudes possess a certain interdependence is an intuitively plausible thesis. That the interdependence may be such that attitudes are actually constituted by their relations with other attitudes, even to the extent that attitudes may be indeterminate, may seem to accord with our intuitions less well. We may even be led to regard the thesis of constitutive holism as itself an unusual and perhaps counter-intuitive thesis. It is not so unusual, however, that similar ideas cannot be found in the work of other thinkers. Structuralist and post-structuralist theories, for instance, make use of holistic ideas that not only provide a point of similarity with the holism I have described here, but also provide a further illustration of the general form of such holism. Holistic notions within structuralism, and within those theories that develop from it or as a reaction to it, are exemplified in the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure. There language is conceived, not as a system of items (words) possessing their own intrinsic values, but as a system of relationships. As Saussure puts it: 'Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others ... in language there are only differences.'² The differences that make up language are differences of sound and of idea.³ Thus, the English words 'back' and 'pack' are distinguished first by the differences in the initial sounds of those words, and second by the different concepts they express. Each word is identified because of its place within a system of such differences, and as the system alters so do the elements of that system. To illustrate this latter point, Saussure directs attention to the fact that the French word 'mouton' has no exact counterpart in English. For while the French word can refer to both the living animal and the meat of that animal, the English 'sheep' is distinguished from the English 'mutton'.⁴ Saussure emphasizes that, while language is indeed a system of differences, it is a system of differences 'without positive terms.'⁵ Consequently, the linguistic system is not a system of separate items between which certain extrinsic

relations hold, but a system wherein the elements of the system are themselves constituted by the differences and relationships between them.⁶

Holism with respect to the psychological often gives rise to an indeterminacy of the psychological. This is something we have already seen in Davidson – much the same occurs in Saussure. On the Saussurean account, linguistic indeterminacy arises by virtue of the fact that there are no independent elements that determine any element of the linguistic system. Consequently, any change in the relations that constitute the elements of the system will result in a change in the system overall. Such indeterminacy seems to become explicit in the work of post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida. Derrida himself makes quite clear his debt to Saussure, even while deconstructing the Saussurean texts.⁷ In this respect Saussure's position, and perhaps also that of Derrida,⁸ has important similarities to Davidson's. In radical interpretation, the interdependence of meaning and belief, and the consequent lack of any independent ground from which interpretation can proceed (even charity provides no such ground), leads to the absence of any uniquely correct interpretative account and the same applies to interpretation more generally, in the work of Davidson, as well as in many structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers⁹ – interpretation is a shifting, even playful, procedure, that always admits of more than one resolution.

3.1.2 The interconnectedness of attitudes

Just as Saussure sees language as a system of differences, so the psychological realm is essentially a system of differences or relations (one could also treat it, in more explicitly semiotic terms, as a sign-system). This is first and foremost a claim about the constitution of the psychological itself. It is also a claim about the nature of the theories that attempt to describe and explain aspects of that realm: such theories will be governed by the holistic constitution of the psychological. Holism is thus the determining feature both of interpretation and of the psychological realm as such. But, rather than taking holism to be a general feature of the psychological in general, it sometimes seems as if Davidson regards the holistic character of the psychological as essentially a matter of the holistic character of belief alone. Davidson thus refers to the interdependent character of beliefs as an illustration of the 'holistic character of the mental'. He writes: 'We cannot intelligibly attribute the thought that a piece of ice is melting to someone who does not have many true beliefs about the nature of ice, its physical properties connected with water, cold, solidity and so forth.'

The one attribution rests on the supposition of many more – endlessly more.¹⁰ While the focus on belief alone was more pronounced in some of Davidson’s early discussions of radical interpretation, it has since become quite clear that it is not just beliefs that are implicated in the holism ‘of the mental’, but ‘wishes, hopes desires, emotions ... and fears.’¹¹ In fact, any propositional attitude attributed to a speaker takes its place amongst a constellation of attitudes, as part of an interconnected attitudinal system.

The interconnectedness of attitudes is evident both from introspective evidence and from the manner in which we explain and interpret others. In our own case we typically make decisions according to our beliefs, desires, hopes and other attitudes. If I decide to drive from Perth to Geraldton tomorrow, one might expect that this decision will be reflected not only in my behavior tomorrow, but that it will also presuppose certain beliefs and desires that I have now – maybe I wish to go to Geraldton to visit friends. This, of course, presupposes my desire to see those friends, and also presupposes that I have some expectation of actually being able to see them in Geraldton. That I have decided to drive there presupposes that I have access to a vehicle of some sort – a vehicle that, moreover, I believe will get me there. Many other attitudes may also be implicated – not just beliefs, but desires and all the rest. That attitudes do exhibit this sort of interconnection is a simple fact about our mental lives. It is a fact that we assume in explaining the actions and utterances of others. The so-called practical inference, in which a belief and desire are coupled together as premises in which the conclusion is an action (or description of an action or decision to act), exemplifies, and relies upon, this sort of mental interconnection.

The fact of such holistic interconnection is made even more evident by considering what happens when the connections between attitudes break down. For simplicity’s sake, consider a case where it is the connectivity of beliefs that is threatened, for instance, a case where there seems to be no clear coherence (where coherence is understood to include relations of logical consistency as well as of more general integration) in the beliefs attributable to a speaker. Suppose we have a speaker, Smith, whom we are unable to interpret in any consistent way. She apparently believes that snow is white; that the ground at the South Pole is covered in green; that there is nothing but snow at the South Pole; that the South Pole is north of Australia; that Australia is the capital city of the South Pole; that the South Pole is an imaginary place... and so on. Are we to attribute all these beliefs to Smith? And if we are not to attribute all of them then just which beliefs are we to attribute?

In some cases we may be happy to attribute, if not all, then a great many of these beliefs to Smith, on the grounds that Smith does not, or cannot, recognize the inconsistency, or is perhaps equivocating. Or we may be willing to interpret her utterances as a pretence at such belief: Smith, we may suppose, is play-acting or joking with us. But suppose that this sort of rationalization will not work, and that there is no way of sorting out some set of relatively consistent beliefs that can be attributed to Smith. In that case it would be hard to work out just what Smith did believe. For, of course, whether we attribute a particular belief to a speaker will be relevant to what other beliefs it is appropriate to attribute to that speaker. Thus, where a speaker seems to hold a belief A *that* is inconsistent with belief B, then the holding of A will, all things being equal and assuming that the speaker is aware of the inconsistency, typically count as evidence against the speaker also holding belief B. Indeed, in Smith's case (as is the case with any 'speaker'), too much ineradicable inconsistency amongst her supposed beliefs may lead us to decide that the utterances that express those 'beliefs' are not really meaningful utterances at all; that they do not, in fact, express beliefs on Smith's part; and that, consequently, there are no beliefs we can attribute to Smith. The same will apply if it is Smith's attitudes in general that lack consistency. Indeed, such universal failure in the coherence of beliefs will almost certainly imply a failure in the coherence of attitudes. It is hard to see how Smith could have an inconsistent set of beliefs, and yet possess a consistent set of desires, wishes etc. This is not just because some of Smith's beliefs will be beliefs about her own attitudes, but also because many of the objects of desire will be identical with the objects of belief. Desires about those objects will be informed by the beliefs Smith has. Thus any inconsistency in belief will likely be mirrored in an inconsistency amongst Smith's other attitudes.

Yet, of course, the holism that is a feature of attitudes must also extend to behavior. In fact, if the practical inference that has been such a focus of discussion in the philosophy of action¹² can be used to explain actions, then it can only be so used insofar as it shows how the action is to be integrated into a network of attitudes. And, where the integration of attitudes itself breaks down, we would equally expect such incoherence to be expressed in the speaker's behavior. Generally speaking I do not see how this could be avoided where the inconsistency is widespread. Consider Smith's case once more. We know she has some strange beliefs about snow and grass and the South Pole. We also know that Smith is in need of money. Foolishly we decide to employ Smith as a painter. On being told to paint the garden fence white,

she first pulls up the flower beds, heaps flowers over the car and then, suddenly, daffodil in hand, she races off down the street yelling as she goes that she will meet us at the South Pole – she is later apprehended by the authorities as she wrestles with a mannequin in a shop window.

The tendency when confronted with such an example is to automatically look for a story that would fit these apparently incoherent actions together. That we do this, just as we do in the case of inconsistent beliefs, is itself evidence of the holistic character of the psychological and of interpretation. But suppose there is no coherent story that we can fit together. Suppose that the incoherence becomes more and more extreme. Here it becomes difficult even to sketch out an example to illustrate such a possibility. For providing such an example would mean providing a case of such radical breakdown in coherence that it would be difficult even to recognize the behavior as behavior that could prima facie constitute action, or as behavior that could be said to express a belief or set of beliefs. This is already starting to happen in the elaboration of Smith's case. Indeed, when the inconsistency in Smith's behavior and in the beliefs we attempt to attribute to Smith becomes too extreme, then there will likely be no alternative but to conclude that Smith is a creature who simply does not make sense. Such a conclusion would lead to grave doubts about whether there is any possibility of construing Smith as a creature involved in any meaningful doing or saying or believing. But, given the nature of belief, meaning and action as constituted by their very inter-relation, this is hardly any different from the conclusion that Smith is not doing, saying or believing anything at all. 'We know what states of mind are like, and how they are correctly identified', says Davidson, 'they are just those states whose contents can be discovered in well-known ways. If other people or creatures are in states not discoverable by these methods, it can be, not because our methods fail us, but because those states are not correctly called states of mind – they are not beliefs, desires, wishes or intentions.'¹³

3.2 Holism and anti-holism

3.2.1 Breakdowns in belief: the case of Mrs T

The holistic character of the psychological is a feature of the psychological that becomes evident to us whenever we start seriously to examine the way in which we go about making sense of what people say, do, think and feel. Yet it might be thought that such holism is merely a feature of the phenomenology of

our mental lives, and not a feature of beliefs and attitudes themselves. The apparently holistic character of the psychological might then turn out to be a relatively insignificant feature that is no barrier to a more atomistic and reductive approach in semantic and, more generally, psychological theory.

Certainly much of my argument in support of holism so far has depended on the use of examples, particularly the example of the hapless Smith, and it is at least possible that an opponent of the holistic approach might take issue with these examples. Jerry Fodor, in fact, takes issue with an example similar to my own, that is used by Stephen Stich to illustrate the holism of belief.¹⁴ Stich cites the example of an elderly lady ('Mrs T') who assents to the sentence 'McKinley was assassinated', and yet is unsure who McKinley was and cannot remember whether McKinley is dead or alive. Stich claims that we would normally be unwilling to attribute to Mrs T the belief that McKinley was assassinated. Now, if we were to be absolutely correct here, I think we would have to say that the account Stich gives is simply not enough to enable us to decide how to interpret Mrs T. That is something that could only be decided by actually engaging in the project of interpretation by talking to her and trying to make sense of her conversation and behavior. Generally, though, we can probably treat Mrs T as exemplifying much the same holistic point as did Smith in my own example above. (There too, of course, the situation was somewhat artificial – whether we could make sense of Smith depends on the concrete circumstances of interpretation). Thus we can, for the purposes of discussion, at least, accept Stich's reading of the case, and the likely difficulty in attributing to Mrs T the belief that McKinley was assassinated.

Certainly, if there is this latter difficulty, then this will be because Mrs T's utterances suggest a breakdown in the necessary connections between her putative beliefs – she is willing to say that McKinley was assassinated, but cannot say whether McKinley is dead. Fodor's response is to point out that, while Stich's example might show that we are unwilling to attribute beliefs in the absence of appropriate connections between beliefs, it does not show that the breakdown in connections between beliefs causes the loss of the particular belief that McKinley was assassinated:

What's uncontroversial about Mrs T is only that she forgot many things about death, assassination, and President McKinley and that she ceased to believe that McKinley was assassinated. But what needs to be shown to make a case

for Meaning Holism is that she ceased to believe that President McKinley was assassinated because she forgot many things about death, assassination and President McKinley.¹⁵

Fodor's point seems to be that if we cannot prove that the breakdown in beliefs causes the loss of a further belief, then we have not shown that the identity of beliefs depends on the connections with other beliefs. In that case we will not have established a case for holism.

In making this point, however, Fodor misrepresents what holism (or what Fodor refers to as 'Meaning Holism'¹⁶) commits us to. The lack of the appropriate connections between Mrs T's beliefs does not cause Mrs T's ambiguous epistemic state with regard to McKinley's assassination. Undoubtedly there are certain physiological events – changes in the structure and organization of Mrs T's brain – that have brought this state about. But those same physiological events are presumably also responsible for the general breakdown in the connections between beliefs that is given specific manifestation in Mrs T's beliefs or lack of beliefs about McKinley. The primary claim made by the holist here is not that forgetfulness of some beliefs will cause other beliefs to be forgotten, but that we cannot hold beliefs independently of other beliefs. Thus, the point is not that a breakdown in the connections between beliefs will cause a breakdown in the identity of beliefs, but rather that a breakdown in connections between beliefs is the same thing as a breakdown in the identity of particular beliefs. The one does not cause the other, for there are not two things involved here: a breakdown in connections is a breakdown in identity, since identity is just a matter of connectedness. This point is nicely illustrated by reference to Saussure's linguistic holism. There a breakdown in the differences between 'back' and 'pack' – the result of an inability, say, to sound 'b' and 'p' in a way that differentiates between them – would result in the two words becoming indistinguishable. Here loss of identity is the same thing as a loss of differences. That loss of identity and of difference is itself the result of a failure in the ability to sound differentially the two phonemes 'b' and 'p'.

At least two other points should be borne in mind here. One is that the holist need not be committed to any particular view about the causes of anomalies in belief or of anomalies in the psychological in general – holism primarily concerns the logical (rather than causal) dependence of the identity of beliefs on other beliefs – and so claims about the causes of psychological anomaly will not

count one way or another on the holism issue. Another point is that cases like that of Mrs T serve only to illustrate how attributions of belief are sensitive to other belief attributions. They do not provide an argument to this effect, though hopefully they do exhibit the interdependence that is at issue. Moreover, given that holism does obtain in respect of belief attribution – and generally this is not denied, at least not within the framework of belief desire psychology or what is often called folk psychology (what is usually at issue is not the existence of holism but its extent) – then, as I suggested earlier, it is hard to see how it can fail to obtain at the level of actual psychology.

3.2.2 Meaning holism and meaning nihilism

There is a further objection that Fodor makes against holism that is particularly relevant here. In discussing the holistic approach to confirmation that Quine sets out in ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ (an approach that I referred to in chapter one as Quine’s ‘epistemic holism’, and that I took as an element in Quine’s holistic approach to translation), Fodor claims that Quine’s views do not lead to a holism about meaning at all, but instead to a semantic nihilism – to the denial that there are any semantic entities at all.¹⁷ Here Fodor’s implicit claim seems to be that Quinean arguments can only lead to nihilism and not to holism about meaning. Holism and nihilism, Fodor apparently assumes, are incompatible.

So far I have said relatively little about the indeterminacy thesis as it follows from holism. I shall have more to say in chapter four (see especially 4.1 below). Certainly, however, one might regard the indeterminacy thesis in Quine (and in my own Davidsonian account) as a form of nihilism about meaning insofar as it undermines the idea of meaning as a determinate and determinable entity attaching to sentences or terms. Moreover it is clear that Quinean indeterminacy depends on Quinean epistemic holism. But Quine’s holism about belief leads to indeterminacy about meaning, as I argued in chapter one, only via the inseparability of meaning and information, or, as we might otherwise put it, the inseparability of meaning and belief. Thus, if the indeterminacy thesis does embody a certain sort of semantic nihilism, it is a nihilism that itself derives from a holism that treats belief and meaning holistically. In this sense, holism about meaning is not incompatible with semantic nihilism in the form of the acceptance of translational indeterminacy.

Yet it is, in any case, somewhat misleading to speak of indeterminacy as a form of nihilism. Semantic nihilism presumably denies that there are meanings. Indeterminacy does not do this; it accepts that there are meanings, but insists that such meanings are always indeterminate – meaning becomes, as Davidson has commented, a ‘theoretical construction’.¹⁸ Such indeterminacy consists, not in the rejection of meaning, but rather in the claim that there is always more than one acceptable way of assigning meanings to utterances.¹⁹ This is semantically nihilistic only if one assumes an account of meaning that assumes that meanings are always unique and always determinate. But the account of meaning is, of course, just what is at issue here. It is, then, begging the question somewhat to treat the indeterminacy thesis as a form of semantic nihilism.

Fodor does not himself claim to have any conclusive argument against the holism thesis.²⁰ He sees his arguments as demonstrating its implausibility, but he suggests that there are no conclusive arguments against holism, or against ‘Meaning Holism’, because of the indefinite character of the thesis itself.²¹ The doctrine is simply too vague to be capable of clear and decisive refutation – or so Fodor seems to suggest. Whether holism is indeed a vague doctrine will, of course, depend on the concept of precision we employ, and there may be some notions of precision to which holistic accounts are hostile. They may well, for instance, resist attempts at formalisation, and they are unlikely to offer reductive accounts of their central concepts. In this respect, the demand for certain sorts of precision may well beg the question, once again, against any holistic account. Of course, if the thesis of psychological holism is correct, then the structure being described here – the structure of the psychological – is not merely holistic, but also indeterminate. The appearance of imprecision may thus be simply a manifestation of the indeterminacy of the structure being described, and indeterminacy, of course, is not the same as imprecision.²²

3.2.3 Holism and reductive theories of meaning

In his opposition to the holism thesis Fodor is not alone, nor are his views isolated from much broader philosophical issues.²³ It is, indeed, important to realize that Fodor’s objections to holism are representative of his adoption of an approach to semantics, and to psychology in general, that is not only very widespread within the philosophical community, but that is also quite different from Davidson’s and, consequently, from my own. Fodor, along with Michael Devitt²⁴ and others,²⁵ takes a view of meaning as essentially

based in reference. Reference is itself understood as a causally determined relation²⁶ holding between mental representations and objects in the world. These mental representations are themselves expressed in what Fodor calls the language of thought or mentalese. The account promises a physicalist basis for semantics since it ties semantic theory in this form to a functionalist or computationalist account of the mental.²⁷ Mentalese is something like the programming language of the computer that is the brain. Thus, the Fodorian account marries a causal theory of reference to a functional account of the mind, thereby providing a thoroughly physicalist account of meaning (and of mental content).

Davidson, however, has argued explicitly against any attempt to treat reference as the fundamental notion in our understanding of meaning.²⁸ The essential problem with taking reference as the primary notion here is that such an approach cannot adequately take account of the holistic character of the psychological. Referential theories of meaning look to the connections between terms and predicates and entities in the world in defining meaning. But the holistic character of the psychological means that the primary level at which semantic and linguistic notions intermesh with the non-linguistic is not at the level of the components of sentences (the level of terms and predicates), but only at the level of sentences themselves. This is because it is at the sentential level that language interconnects with attitudes and behavior. If it sometimes seems plausible to suppose that such interconnections also obtain at the level of individual terms, then this is only because it is sometimes unclear whether a term is functioning as a sentence. Thus 'Rabbit!', as we gesture towards the creature before us, may operate as a sentence in which the sentential structure is, shall we say, suppressed, rather than as a singular term.²⁹ Single terms and predicates may represent the components of language, but they do not represent language in use. It is in language in use that meaning arises – through the meshing of language with beliefs, intentions, desires and behavior. This point is merely a restatement of the thesis of psychological holism.

The point has a quite general application: no theory can be adequate as a theory of meaning that looks to the semantic properties of parts of language whether they be referential properties or even intensional properties (the latter view is championed by, for instance, J. J. Katz³⁰). This is not merely because words only have meaning in the context of a sentence, but because it is only at the level of sentences that the necessary relations open up between sentences and language, and between language and other aspects of psychology and behavior. As Davidson comments: 'Words have no function save as they

play a role in sentences: their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from their part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions.³¹

Reference is a notion that is abstracted out of the holistic structure in which meaning, attitudes and behavior relate together. The referential relation is one that obtains at a level lower than the level at which meaning is itself generated. So meaning cannot be analyzed in terms of reference, for that would be to analyze meaning in terms of a notion that can only be specified against a prior semantic (and more generally, psychological) background.³² Meaning cannot be reduced to reference, because that would be to take meaning out of the network of concepts within which it arises – the network of attitudes and behavior. What we can hope to do is to define meaning by reference to truth, for truth does operate at the level of sentences – at a level that interconnects with the linguistic and the non-linguistic.

Truth is thus the primary notion by which meaning is understood. Truth may be defined for a particular language by means of a Tarskian truth definition. Such a definition will admittedly employ a concept of reference or satisfaction, but this is necessary only because we need to establish how the meanings of sentences might be dependent on sentential structure. The use of a notion of reference is not as a defining notion with respect to truth, but is part of the explanatory structure within a theory of truth – a theory that serves as a theory of meaning. It is part of the internal machinery of the theory.³³ Truth, not reference, is the pivotal notion here. It is through the notion of truth applying at the level of sentences that the technical Tarskian machinery can be made use of to provide an account of meaning through providing an account of truth. That account is then embedded in a broader account of the psychological in general – an account of attitudes and behavior. The notion of truth connects the micro-semantic structure (the account in terms of components of sentences) with the macro-psychological structure (the network of attitudes and behavior).³⁴ Semantics itself only becomes possible for Davidson by being embedded in a much broader theory that encompasses more than just the semantic. In this respect, objections to the Davidsonian strategy in semantics that claim that a Tarskian account is insufficient to provide an account of meaning fail to appreciate that the Davidsonian project is really an alliance of a Tarskian theory of truth with a broader theory of attitudes and behavior.³⁵

We have already seen that Fodor's arguments against holism are singularly lacking in plausibility. So not only does the Fodorian case against holism fail, but we can also see that the notion of reference itself cannot explain meaning in a way independent of the constraints of holism. Much the same criticism must apply to any other reductive or atomistic account of meaning. It also operates, for instance, against Gricean accounts that attempt to treat meaning in terms of the intentions of speakers.³⁶ On such accounts, meaning would be reduced to a combination of belief and intention, rather than being seen as one element in a more complex and holistic structure. Such a strategy must fail insofar as speakers' intentions cannot be understood independently of the holistic structure of which they are a part. This is not to say that intentions might not have a part to play here, but merely that they do not have a foundational role. Gricean considerations can, indeed, be accommodated, to some extent, within the Davidsonian position. So, in 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs',³⁷ Davidson sets out an account of the interrelation between speaker meaning and literal meaning that takes some account of Gricean intuitions. But, of course, the Davidsonian position cannot allow that speaker's intentions have any privileged role to play in constituting meaning. Meaning is a thoroughly interpretative concept for Davidson – a concept that arises and is elaborated only within the holistic project of interpretation.³⁸

3.2.4 Holism, anomalous monism and psychological reduction

The Fodorian account, and accounts like it, are opposed to the Davidsonian account, not merely at the level of semantic theory, but also in the philosophy of mind with which it is allied. And in both cases the opposition arises largely because of the reductionist elements of the Fodorian account. Fodor reduces meaning to reference; psychological states are reduced to functional states.³⁹ But holism suggests that any reductive account of psychological notions must be mistaken. This goes for reductive accounts of meaning (which attempt to treat meaning as reducible to some other psychological element whether it be speaker's intention, mental representation or whatever) and also for reductive accounts in the philosophy of mind.

One reason such strategies are ruled out by holism is that, if psychological states are constituted by their relations with other states, there can be no appropriate way of separating such states out from the web of connections in which they arise. Another way of putting this point is to say that psychological states are

necessarily rational states insofar as they are constituted by their interconnections with other states. Thus Davidson comments that ‘Each interpretation and attribution of attitude is a move within a holistic theory, a theory necessarily governed by concern for consistency and general coherence with the truth, and it is this that sets these theories forever apart from those that describe mindless objects, or describe objects as mindless.’⁴⁰ The rationality of the psychological, combined with Davidson’s commitment both to the fact of causal interaction between the physical and psychological and the nomological character of causality,⁴¹ is the primary reason preventing any reduction of psychological events to physical events. Any attempt to reduce psychological events to physical events would be unable to capture the crucially rational connections that obtain between elements of the psychological, since the structure of rationality is not mirrored in physical theory in the appropriate fashion. Rational connections cannot be reduced to merely causal connections (although rational connections may be identical with causal connections). Thus the reductionist move would necessarily involve re-describing attitudes, actions and so forth in a way that removed from them the very feature of rationality that was constitutive of them.⁴² Davidson concludes, therefore, that ‘nomological slack between the mental and the physical is essential so long as we conceive of man as a rational animal’.⁴³

Davidson does claim that psychological or mental events are identical with physical events,⁴⁴ but this identity does not, for Davidson, entail reducibility. He accepts an ontology of events as particulars, according to which those events can have mental or physical descriptions, the former not being reducible to the latter.⁴⁵ Indeed, since Davidson denies the existence of any laws that could relate psychological events to physical events, the identity between the psychological and the physical can involve only particular instances of each. Classes or types of psychological events cannot be identified with types or classes of physical events. Thus a particular instance of belief – a particular belief-token – may be identical with a particular physical state of the brain at a particular time – with a particular physical state-token. It is because Davidson does hold that psychological and physical events are identical, at least at the level of event-tokens, that he calls his position a monist one – there is only the one event that can be described in psychological or physical terms. Yet because he also denies that there are laws governing the psychological, or the connection between the psychological and the physical, so Davidson’s monism is an anomalous monism.⁴⁶

While Davidson identifies psychological events with physical events, it is important to recognize that this implies no conceptual or explanatory priority of the one over the other. Thus Davidson says that ‘I have resisted calling my position either materialist or physicalist.... Monistic my view is, since it holds that mental events are physical events, but a form of materialist chauvinism it is not, since it holds that being mental is not an eliminable or derivative property.’⁴⁷ This is an important point. For the assumption of the priority of the physical over the mental – in particular, the assumption that such priority holds in virtue of the fact that it is only at the physical level that causal relations properly obtain – seems to be an element in some attempts to treat the Davidsonian position as really committed to the irrelevance of the mental.⁴⁸ While this raises an enormous set of issues to which I cannot do justice here, I would suggest that often such a view already implicitly assumes the truth of materialism, since it assumes that causal accounts always have priority over rational accounts. Yet one consequence of holism is that (as we shall see more clearly in subsequent chapters) there is no privileged vocabulary, not even the vocabulary of physicalism. All vocabularies are incomplete, and there is no reason to suppose that any one vocabulary should take global precedence over any other. So, on the Davidsonian account, while reasons operate as causes only insofar as they are identical with physical events,⁴⁹ causes may operate as reasons only insofar as they are identical with psychological events.⁵⁰ Davidsonian monism is thus not a narrowly materialist account, and, as Davidson himself points out, ‘if some mental events are physical events, this makes them no more physical than mental. Identity is a symmetrical relation.’⁵¹

Attempts at materialist or physicalist reduction do, of course, face difficulties independently of holism.⁵² But clearly holism itself must be opposed to any attempt to understand the mind in a reductive fashion. Reasons, in virtue of their normative character, cannot be reduced to causes, while, more generally, it seems unlikely that one could isolate mental or physical events in such a way that one could provide any sort of reduction from one to the other. The relation between the mental and the physical may be one of identity, but it is an identity in which neither term is prior. If the attempt to reduce mental events to physical events is unlikely to succeed, neither will the attempt to reduce notions such as meaning and truth to a purely physicalist account fare any better.⁵³ If the Davidsonian account in semantics is correct then such reduction cannot, as we saw earlier, be achieved. There are no more primitive notions to which such

reduction could be made. Any attempt to reduce meaning to reference, for instance, is to lose track of meaning itself.⁵⁴

It may be thought, however, that while some forms of physicalist reduction are ruled out by holism, not all physicalist accounts are ruled out. In particular, functionalist accounts of the mind seem to take some account of holistic considerations, insofar as such accounts treat psychological states in terms of their causal interaction with other psychological states, including behavioral and perceptual states. Thus Brian Loar argues that Davidson's claim that rationality constraints have 'no echo' in physical theory is false. He claims that a functionalist approach to the psychological does allow for the psychological to meet the demands of rationality.⁵⁵ Loar's argument, however, ultimately fail to have up to the promise of the initial suggestion. For, as John McDowell points out, Loar's functionalism assumes an extremely narrow conception of the scope of rationality considerations (Loar restricts them to connections between beliefs whereas, as we have seen here, they apply across the whole range of the psychological),⁵⁶ and does not allow for the richness of the concept of rationality as it applies in psychology.⁵⁷ As McDowell comments 'Even if we restrict attention to cases where the explanatory ideal is deductive rationality, the capacity of one belief to explain another depends on relations that cannot be characterized except intentionally.'⁵⁸ It seems, as we should have expected all along, that the notion of rationality cannot be adequately captured when removed from its proper intentional context.

3.3 Holism and rationality

3.3.1 The nature of psychological connectedness

The idea that the psychological realm is governed by a requirement of overall coherence can be seen as embodying a fundamentally rational conception of the psychological. The psychological can thus be understood as governed by a broad principle of rationality that requires an overall coherence in attitudes and behavior. The requirement of coherence follows from the holistic character of the psychological, and has indeed been implicit in much of the discussion so far. Holism implies connectedness. But connectedness may take a variety of forms. Beliefs, for instance, may be connected simply in virtue of a similarity of subject matter, or in virtue of being held by the same individual. Connectedness of this latter

sort is clearly not what is implied in talk of the holistic character of the psychological. The sort of connectedness that is required is the connectedness that comes from the integration, the fitting together, the 'agreement' of different psychological components. It is this that I have been referring to in talking of the coherence of the psychological. Such coherence involves, as I pointed out earlier, the consistency of attitudes, but also their integration in a more general sense – there should be relationships of implication, of confirmation, of reinforcement and so on between various attitudes in addition to their mere consistency. Most often, however, it is consistency that will be the focus, since inconsistency is particularly threatening to psychological unity.

As I use it here, rationality is also a matter of integration and consistency. It is this conception of rationality that is reflected in the interpretative constraint of charity.⁵⁹ As charity is presupposed by interpretation, so to be a speaker is to exhibit a large degree of rationality. Consequently, we cannot take someone both to be a speaker and also to be largely irrational. This was, in fact, one of the conclusions to be drawn from the case of Smith. As the connections and consistency between her beliefs broke down, it became more and more difficult to understand Smith as a speaker or believer of anything. In Smith's case, we considered not merely a breakdown in epistemic coherence, but a breakdown in attitudinal coherence in general. And, indeed, rationality does not concern beliefs alone, but extends to the psychological realm as a whole – it includes beliefs, desires, fears, hopes and so forth as well as behavior. One might be tempted to say here that rationality is what holds the psychological realm together – it is what binds the many different components of the psychological into one.⁶⁰ But this would be misleading. Beliefs, desires, actions and the rest are themselves constituted by the rational connections that hold between them. Thus rationality is a constitutive principle as much as is the holism of which it is an expression. It is not that beliefs are held together by the rational connections that hold between them, but beliefs are themselves largely constituted by those connections.

It might be useful to point out here that the notion of rationality cannot apply to the whole range of psychological states. Pain, for instance, is not a rational state, and neither are many other states of a similar 'pathological' or 'affective' character. However, while pain is certainly not a rational state insofar as it is not itself constrained by rationality (while every pain will have a cause, one does not have to have a reason to be in pain), it is the case that a particular experience of pain will, nevertheless, be integrated with other

psychological events. It may, for instance, provide a reason for performing a certain action – you take two aspirin and go to bed – or result in a modification of preferences – you no longer want to go to the movies tonight. Whatever, pain, along with many other components of the psychological, is not an experience that arises outside of the rational net of the psychological, even if the cause of its arising is not a rational cause. Similarly emotions are not to be construed as irrational for, in whatever manner they arise, they too must cohere with the psychological in general.⁶¹

If rationality is a matter of coherence between attitudes, behavior and so forth, then this will mean that, while we sometimes treat actions or beliefs as being rational or not, no such action or belief will be irrational in themselves. Of course, one reason for this is that there are no such entities as beliefs or actions except insofar as they figure in connection with other beliefs and actions. There are, we might say, no beliefs that are irrational in themselves, because there are no beliefs 'in themselves' – that is, no beliefs that are constituted independently of other attitudes and of behavior. But the point can also be taken as a reflection of the nature of rationality – or of irrationality. Irrationality arises through the lack of appropriate connectedness – a lack of fit -between attitudes or between attitudes and behavior. Thus, belief in the magical properties of some inanimate object is, taken alone, neither rational nor irrational. It may be all of a piece with many of the other beliefs held by the speaker, and, if so, may well be counted as rational. Similarly, a desire to drink paint need not be irrational if it connects up with the rest of the speaker's desires and beliefs. Such a desire may derive, for instance, from a belief that paint is not merely useful for covering walls, but also reduces cholesterol when taken internally.

The paint-drinking example is an interesting one, because it is at least conceivable that an individual could have the desire to drink paint, and yet not ordinarily be able to explain that desire in terms of appropriate beliefs. Such a desire is the sort of desire that we may well call irrational simply because of the lack of explicit, appropriate connections. Yet, in some cases, such a desire may be explicable by its connection with other beliefs, desires or experiences at a different level of psychological integration – within, we might say, a different reading of the psychological. This sort of point can easily be put in Freudian terms. And one of the crucial features of the Freudian analysis is that it suggests how, in fact, rationality may be a more pervasive feature of the psychological than some of our experience might suggest. Thus, in The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud describes his aim in terms of the surmise

‘that there is a sense and purpose behind the slight functional disturbances of the daily life of healthy people,’⁶² such that even slips of the tongue betray the underlying rationality of the psychological.⁶³

The rationality of beliefs, and of attitudes and behavior in general, consists in their coherence. Rationality is not a property of attitudes or items of behavior taken one by one. The same goes for the concept of irrationality – it is not an intrinsic property of beliefs, and thus no belief is, on taken alone, irrational. Such a conception of rationality falls into the category of a ‘thin’ theory of rationality in the sense used by Jon Elster.⁶⁴ For, while it treats rationality as a matter of the integration of attitudes and behavior, it makes no stipulations about the attitudes and behavior that are thus related. It makes no specification, for instance, concerning the truth or falsity of the particular beliefs on which an action must be based for that action to be regarded as rational (though most of the beliefs with which it is connected must be true). The action is rational simply by virtue of its coherence with other relevant psychological components. This ‘thin’ theory of rationality is not intended to rule out the many other senses that have variously been attached to the notion.⁶⁵ I think that a case can be made, however, for this sense of rationality – rationality as coherence or integration – being the fundamental sense, because it derives from the essential holism of the psychological. As Michael Oakshott comments: ‘What establishes harmony and detects disharmony is the concrete mind, a mind composed wholly of activities in search of harmony and throughout implicated in every achieved level of harmony ... it may be pointed out that this is how we are accustomed to use the word “rational”, although we do not always perceive the implications of using it in this way.’⁶⁶

3.3.2 The limits of irrationality

Rationality is a general feature of the psychological, yet it cannot be treated as constraining the psychological in too rigid a fashion. Holism notwithstanding, the psychological realm can indeed tolerate a certain amount of irrationality. Certainly there is no doubt that all speakers exhibit a certain amount of incoherence in their attitudes and behavior, even given the general sense of incoherence being used here. Some element of incoherence, particularly in the form of inconsistency, is, in fact, a common feature of the psychological. The attitudes and behavior of speakers are subject to continual modification as speakers have to cope with new information, new situations, new interlocutors. Inconsistency can readily arise with

such shifts in attitudes and with other changes in a speaker's overall psychology. Moreover, speakers generally come to discover inconsistencies only gradually, since they are not able to recognize all the implications and interconnections among their beliefs simultaneously. In fact, not only can they not do so simultaneously, they can never do so, since there is no possibility, by virtue of the particular character of the psychological, of considering the psychological in its entirety in a way which would allow attitudes to be identified. Any attempt to interpret the psychological is, as we shall see in chapter four, not merely indeterminate, but also necessarily incomplete. Inconsistency can be seen as an inevitable consequence of this latter feature, as well as of the dynamic character of the psychological. While such inconsistency will be relatively unproblematic so long as the speaker is willing and able to resolve such inconsistency when it is recognized, the presence of irrationality of this sort is nevertheless an indication of the imperfect character of psychological coherence.⁶⁷

Yet incoherence can, of course, also arise in more problematic or pathological forms. Cases of akrasia or weakness of the will might be taken as fairly common instances of this – cases of mental illness represent more serious examples (the example of Smith, if it were to be properly explained, would almost certainly have to be explained in such terms). Here, particularly in the case of mental illness, there must be limits on how much incoherence can be tolerated. Indeed, if the connections between attitudes and behavior break down to a great enough extent, it will become questionable whether there is even any irrationality involved. For too much breakdown in the coherence of beliefs, actions and so on leads to an inability to identify beliefs and actions at all, and so the question of rationality or irrationality is no longer applicable. Irrationality is thus, as Davidson himself comments, 'a failure within the house of reason.'⁶⁸ Irrationality can only make sense against an otherwise rational background.

Davidson has suggested, however, that many cases of irrationality can be explained within a rational framework through the idea that the psychological is 'partitioned' into various overlapping 'territories'. Irrationality arises, on this account, when there is conflict between beliefs or desires from within different territories. Irrationality is then not so much a conflict between different beliefs as between different, and to some extent 'self-contained', parts of the psychological realm. The internal consistency of each such 'part' or territory is thereby preserved at the cost of some loss of psychological consistency overall.⁶⁹ Such an account is largely Freudian in its general orientation, although it is not true to Freud in

one crucial respect, that is, it elides the central Freudian notion of repression.⁷⁰ Davidson acknowledges that this strategy does not achieve a perfect reconciliation between the fact of irrationality and the requirements of holism. He also seems to suggest that no such complete reconciliation should be expected. Indeed, ‘complete reconciliation’ would seem to require the transformation of irrationality into rationality, thereby exhibiting irrationality as a mere appearance, and this possibility would certainly not fit with the nature of psychological holism. The dynamic character of the psychological realm has the inevitable consequence that the consistency of that realm can indeed never be perfect; given some notion of psychological ‘partitioning’, one can nevertheless also see how consistency will be most important within particular areas, and within areas that are ‘partitioned’ close together.

Such talk of partitioning will, in chapter four (§4.1.3), be translated into my own talk of the ‘localized’ character of the psychological; rather than talk of territories I will talk about ‘projects’ and their constitution within certain ‘horizons’. Coherence will be of most importance within particular psychological localities, that is, within particular projects and sets of projects, for in such cases incoherence will lead to, and will also reflect, the breakdown in those projects. Incoherence that arises between different projects need not of itself be problematic, and need not represent a violation of holism. For some projects may never come into contact, either in practice (where the carrying through of one project impinges upon the aims or activities implicated in another project – as the pursuit of gastronomic enjoyment may interfere with the maintenance of a particular dietary regime) or in interpretation (where we are concerned to articulate and understand the projects themselves in terms of the beliefs and other attitudes they presuppose). Where projects do not come into contact any incoherence must remain, not merely notional, but unrealized and unrecognized. This account also has the virtue of allowing for an analogue of the notion of repression – the locality established within a particular horizon is established through the ‘repressing’, the ‘hiding’ of what lies beyond the horizontal boundary.⁷¹

The notion of the localized character of rationality provides a way of explaining how psychological breakdown, of the sort envisaged in an extreme form in Smith’s case, may be possible. In such cases what we seem to see is essentially a disintegration of the overall rationality of the psychological in favor of its more localized manifestations.⁷² It is as if the psychological is fragmented into a myriad of different, sometimes contradictory, sometimes loosely associated, projects. Some rationality is preserved,

and this is what makes it possible to achieve a degree of understanding of what is going on (so, for instance, it seems that we can understand Mrs T's utterances about McKinley's assassination within certain limited contexts), but such rationality remains only at a highly localized level, and our ability to understand becomes more and more diffuse as we move to levels of greater generality.

If psychological coherence is largely, though not exclusively, a matter of consistency, then the consistency that characterizes the psychological realm is a consistency that must indeed also tolerate a certain amount of inconsistency. To some extent, however, it is not inconsistency as such that is problematic, so much as real and recognized incoherence that the interpreter cannot resolve or that the speaker will not resolve, and that extends to infect some large portion of the network of attitudes and behavior. It is inconsistency of this sort that threatens the overall integration of the psychological realm, and that consequently undermines the possibility of interpretation. So in Smith's case it is not simply the presence of inconsistent beliefs that makes Smith unintelligible, but the presence of an inconsistency that is widespread and seemingly incapable of resolution. The requirement of consistency is thus not so much a requirement that all beliefs should be consistent, as a general requirement that where inconsistency is found it must be resolved. And this requirement constrains both interpreter and speaker.

The sense in which the requirement of consistency operates here as a constraint, however, is not a sense that leaves room for choice as to whether inconsistency actually will be resolved. There can be no question of choice here. If the speaker is indeed a rational creature (and thus can be counted as having beliefs and other attitudes), then it is simply in the nature of its being rational that such a creature will typically attempt to resolve or minimize inconsistency among its attitudes and behavior – this might even be achieved, in some cases, through maintaining the partitions that separate one set of beliefs from another inconsistent set. Thus it is perhaps inappropriate to talk, as I did above, about the existence of widespread inconsistency that a speaker 'will not' resolve. Failure to resolve such inconsistency in some way or other (and it may be, of course, that the inconsistency appears only because of the particular interpretative strategy we adopt) must cast doubt on the hypothesis that the creature concerned has beliefs, desires and so forth of the sort that we find to be inconsistent in the first place.

While consistency is a necessary feature of the psychological that arises out of its holistic character, it would nevertheless be mistaken to regard the commitment to holism as bringing with it a

commitment to the need for some sort of ‘perfect’ consistency amongst attitudes and behavior, or to regard the psychological as strictly governed by any iron-bound law of reason.⁷³ In fact the need to allow for the possibility of some irrationality on the part of those we interpret (including ourselves) is, as we have already seen, something that Davidson himself notes. While he writes that ‘the basic methodology of interpretation tells us that inconsistency breeds unintelligibility’, he goes on to point out that:

[this] is a matter of degree... What sets a limit to the amount of irrationality we can make psychological sense of is a purely conceptual or theoretical matter – the fact that mental states and events are constituted the states and events they are by their location in a logical space. On the other hand, what constrains the amount and kind of consistency and correspondence with reality we find in our fellow men and women is the frailty of human nature.⁷⁴

There is no way we can decide beforehand just how much or what sort of irrationality is tolerable. It is always a matter of making allowances as interpretation actually proceeds.⁷⁵

3.3.3 Holism and theories of rationality

Since the notion of rationality, as I use it here, is little more than the notion of coherence among psychological components, it is resistant to any attempt to give it a more formal or technical specification. The coherence of the psychological is not the coherence of a formal logical system, but something much more flexible and approximate. It is a matter of ‘fitting together’ – and whether things fit together is a matter of degree and of judgment. Thus there are no a priori criteria of rationality, and there is no way of clearly stating the limits of rationality or irrationality. Any such attempt can be no more than an approximation. As Brian McLaughlin comments ‘the broad notion of rational coherence which Davidson describes ... does not seem to admit of precise conditions of application.’⁷⁶ This suggests that there will be limits to attempts within philosophy and social science to develop any hard-edged account of the notion of rationality. In particular, it suggests real limits on the scope and applicability of rational choice theory – which is the prime example of such an attempt – according to which rationality is a matter of the maximization of utility.

This is one area where the ‘thin’ theory of rationality that follows from holism does operate against certain other, more technical, definitions of rationality – at least in limiting the scope and generality of such definitions. It thus operates against any attempt to develop the notion of rationality embodied in rational choice theory as a theory of rationality as such. Rationality, understood as a holistic constraint, is too indeterminate a notion to be amenable to any such analysis, except within certain narrowly specified domains. Indeed, it is interesting to note that in practice rational choice theory has been most successfully applied to examples that involve a relatively limited set of psychological variables – most often economic examples such as the buying of a car or the adoption of a particular production strategy.⁷⁷ One could reasonably predict that as the relevant psychological domain is broadened – as more and various psychological factors enter into the frame – so the conception of rationality to be employed will become either increasingly general, or increasingly hedged about with additional hypotheses.

Yet, while I have argued here that the Davidsonian account of rationality ought to be seen as operating against any attempt to treat the rational choice model as anything other than a narrow theory of rationality, and against any attempt to develop a technical notion of rationality in general, it is nevertheless the case that the Davidsonian account has often been taken as supporting the rational choice model.⁷⁸ One obvious reason for this is the emphasis that Davidson’s work gives to the notion of rationality as a characteristic feature of the psychological – rational choice theory is similarly committed to the possibility of rationally explaining choice and action.⁷⁹ Moreover rational choice theory is based on the idea of the interdependence of beliefs, desires and actions, while Davidson has himself drawn explicit parallels between decision-theoretic approaches (which underlie the rational choice model) and holism.⁸⁰ Yet there really should be no problem here: Davidson’s work has been influential in the development of rational choice theory, but it also suggests limitations in that theory. Certainly, the fact that the Davidsonian position provides part of the background for rational choice theory does not imply that the Davidsonian position is committed to treating rational choice theory as embodying anything other than a limited conception of rationality.

Rational choice theory has itself, of course, been the subject of a fair degree of criticism. In this respect, however, it is useful to note that many of the objections made against rational choice theory – that it is unduly individualistic; that it takes little or no account of the influence of institutional and other social

factors on the behavior of individuals; that the belief-desire model it presupposes is too simplistic⁸¹ – do not seem to be properly applicable to the Davidsonian position itself. Certainly Davidsonian holism need not itself be construed as excessively individualistic. As will become evident later, on the reading I suggest, one of the implications of holism is that individuals can only be understood in relation to the wider communal and social setting. More generally, it should be noted that Davidson’s holistic and externalist conception of the nature of psychological states means that such states cannot be treated in separation from the speaker’s behavior, from the wider social setting, or from the environment, within which those states are necessarily interconnected (see especially the discussion of the role of propositionality in §3.4.1 below).

Moreover, not only is the psychological realm constituted in a way that differs markedly from the way in which it is understood within standard belief-desire psychology, but rationality is not itself a formal rule that somehow connects actions to beliefs and desires according to some prior formula. Rationality is rather an expression of the overall consistency or coherence of the psychological realm in general. It is an expression of the unity of the psychological. As Merleau-Ponty comments:

To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm one another, a meaning emerges. Rationality is not a problem. There is behind it no unknown quantity which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships.⁸²

In Merleau-Ponty, the idea of rationality is itself closely tied to the idea of the world: ‘The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other like gears.’⁸³ Both rationality and world express similar notions of unity and integration. The underlying notion of unity here, and the intimate connection between rationality and world, will also be important in my own account. As we shall see later, the rational unity of the psychological is reflected in the all-encompassing horizon of the world (see §4.3.2).

3.3.4 What animals are rational?

The rationality of the psychological realm consists in the maintenance of a certain degree of connectedness between the various components of the psychological. If this is what rationality amounts to, one question that may arise is a question Davidson puts: 'What animals are rational?'⁸⁴ According to Davidson the answer is that to be rational is to possess propositional attitudes: 'to be a rational animal is just to have propositional attitudes'.⁸⁵ Moreover Davidson connects the having of propositional attitudes with the use of language. In that case, it would seem that rationality will also be defined in terms of being a language user. This is, indeed, the suggestion that Davidson makes. Rationality, he says 'is a social trait. Only communicators have it.'⁸⁶ Does this suggest a criterion of rationality – namely the having of propositional attitudes – in addition to that of connectedness?

In fact, while Davidson has presented this criterion of rationality as if it were indeed additional to, or independent of, the criterion of connectedness, it need not be viewed as such. Psychological holism is a constitutive thesis. In this sense rationality, as connectedness, is constitutive of the psychological itself. Thus having propositional attitudes, and being a language user, must presuppose that one is rational, because only if one is rational (that is, if there is the appropriate degree of psychological coherence) can one have attitudes or make meaningful utterances. This does not demonstrate that rationality as coherence is a more fundamental notion than that of being a language user or being a creature who has propositional attitudes, but it does show that the notions of being a language user and having propositional attitudes are not independent of the notion of rationality. The question then, however, is whether rationality can be understood independently of linguistic ability or the having of propositional attitudes. Davidson has, of course, argued that rationality, which he defines in terms of having propositional attitudes, does presuppose language. This has led him to deny that dumb animals are rational, and to deny that they have propositional attitudes on the grounds that they lack any properly linguistic capacity.⁸⁷ Davidson's denial of attitudes such as believing, wanting, fearing and so forth to such animals has been a controversial claim. If the thesis of psychological holism were committed to such a claim, that might also, in the eyes of some, be a reason for viewing such holism with suspicion.

In fact, holism alone need not commit us to denying that all non-human animals, dumb or otherwise, lack the capacity, in some sense, to have beliefs, desires, fears and the rest. What holism points to is the fact that psychological structure is always such as to exhibit a certain holistic interconnection.

Thus, insofar as an animal is possessed of any sort of psychological structure, that structure will be a holistic one. Consequently, the question of whether or not we can properly talk about animals as having propositional attitudes is an issue largely independent of the question whether or not animal psychology is constrained by holism.

Certainly, however, there will be differences between the psychological structure to be found in different animals. One way of capturing this difference is to say that the holistic structure of many non-human animals is a looser and less richly complex structure than that found, for instance, in humans. This idea can be explicated in more than one way. One way of doing so, a way suggested by Davidson, looks to the degree to which failure of substitutability holds. 'With animals, for example, it is unclear that we can change true attributions to false by substituting co-extensive terms; if so, that marks a big distinction, since failure of such substitutability is often taken to be the mark of the intensional.'⁸⁸ The ideas that I will deploy in chapter four, according to which the psychological will be understood as organised around particular, local projects, will provide another way of explicating the difference here. Each such project is constituted within a horizon or framework. One feature of human psychology is that it is always possible to move to a wider horizon. One might say that the wider the possible horizons, the more complex the psychological system. This idea is expressed in linguistic terms by reference to a feature of human language emphasized by Chomsky, that such language can be used in a way that is independent of any immediate physical stimulus.⁸⁹

These differences between different levels of psychological structure provide some warrant for Davidson's suggestion that the notions of rationality and of propositional attitudes should be more restricted in their application, and should not properly be applied to, at least, some nonhuman animals nor perhaps to human infants. But as is suggested by Davidson's own softening of his position here,⁹⁰ the issue is a complex and difficult one. It is made more difficult by something to which Davidson does not pay much attention, and that is the considerable literature on (non-human) animal language.⁹¹ Yet shifting the focus to language does not, in any case, make the issues at stake here any more tractable – it merely opens up a new ground on which much the same issues must be fought out. Moreover, any attempt to develop a notion of language or 'proto-language'⁹² that would apply to non-human animals and that would be distinct

from language in the human case is likely to face exactly the same difficulties as arise for the attempt to distinguish analogous senses of rationality.

Given the breadth of psychological holism to include behavior in general, one might be tempted to argue, however, that the tendency to turn to language as the important notion here is, in any case, misconceived and that non-linguistic behavior might indeed provide good reason for the attribution of attitudes of some form. Such a view might also be thought to be supported by the fact that, as Davidson himself admits,⁹³ we do successfully employ intentional idioms in explaining nonhuman animal behavior and probably have no choice but to do so. The difficulty is that the attribution of attitudes does indeed require propositions (for more on this see §3.4.1 immediately below), and where the creatures to whom those propositional attitudes are attributed are themselves incapable either of grasping those propositions, or of assenting to or dissenting from them, then the attribution of attitudes cannot be done in any precise fashion. Indeed, this is exactly what is indicated by the fact that, in the case of non-human animals, the truth of attitudinal attributions is typically not affected by the substitution of co-referring expressions. The psychology of non-human animals thus does not provide a counter-example to the holistic account I have advanced here, although how best to understand that psychology undoubtedly does represent an area in which there is still much to be learnt. Moreover, we should not assume that the only difference at issue here is that between the human and the non-human – it seems likely that psychological structure may differ markedly, not only between some species, but, even more likely, between different groups of species. Such differences will reflect different bodily structures as well as different modes of integration and interaction with the environment.

3.4 The extent of psychological holism

3.4.1 Psychological and attitudinal holism

While the holism of the psychological (expressed in one way in terms of the need for consistency) properly extends to encompass attitudes and behavior, it may nevertheless be tempting to see the interconnection simply of beliefs and other attitudes – what I will call the thesis of attitudinal holism – as the sole basis for the thesis of psychological holism in general, and the associated idea of the holistic character of interpret-

ation. As I suggested earlier, Davidson himself sometimes seems to imply such a view and it might be taken to be an implicit presupposition of his argument against the attribution of rationality to non-human animals given its emphasis on the role of the propositional attitudes and, particularly, belief. If this were so, then the interconnection of attitudes would be the fundamental notion out of which the pairings of truth with meaning and of meaning with belief arise. The priority of attitudinal holism over the more general thesis of psychological holism could be supported by the observation that the interdependence of meaning with belief is largely owing to the fact that utterances are typically expressive of attitudes, particularly beliefs. Similarly, the interdependence of truth with meaning could be said to arise largely because what we mean depends on what we believe, and what we believe is what we hold to be true.

Even so, there is a difficulty in supposing that attitudinal holism alone is the fundamental level of holism. Beliefs are propositional attitudes, and, if the psychological can be reduced to a network of propositional attitudes, then this is to say that the psychological is itself ultimately propositional in character. And while attitudes are constituted in terms of their relations to propositions, this would not seem to be true for behavior or the skills and capacities with which it is associated, nor for states such as pain, and yet these are surely as much a part of the psychological realm as is anything else. Now it may be thought that Davidson himself views the realm of the mental, if not the psychological in general, in a way that does indeed restrict it to the propositional alone, since Davidson seems to conceive of the mental as the realm of just those events or properties that can be described in the language of the propositional attitudes. In this respect, it may be thought that the Davidsonian approach is too 'rationalistic' and that it cannot be adequate to the real character of the psychological as such. Such a response to the Davidsonian account is common among a range of philosophers, often themselves influenced by the thought of such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who view Davidson as failing to appreciate the non-propositional, non-representational character of our involvement with the world.⁹⁴

In this latter respect, Hubert Dreyfus opposes what he calls the 'practical holism' of such as Husserl, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, with what he calls the 'theoretical holism' of Quine, Davidson and Rorty. Such theoretical holism is supposed to be characterized by its treatment of 'all knowledge as an epistemological problem, as a question of theoretical knowledge ... theoretical holism with its account of interpretation as translation must be distinguished from what one might call practical holism, which thinks

of interpretation as explication'.⁹⁵ Practical holism locates understanding against a pervasive background of skills and shared practices that resist attempts at formalization. Elsewhere Dreyfus claims that while Davidson (in company with Searle and others) adopts 'The traditional view of practice [as] representational', Heidegger attempts to 'get beyond the subject/object distinction in all domains, including action'.⁹⁶ The view of practice as 'representation' that Davidson supposedly adopts is, according to Dreyfus, based in Davidson's espousal of idea that action is always to be explained in terms of the beliefs and desires of the agent and this may itself be taken to indicate the way in which Dreyfus' criticism does indeed center on the central role Davidson gives to propositionality in the structure of the mental.

Dreyfus' concern is with the connection, or lack of connection, between the propositional and the practical, and this is something to which I shall turn shortly. But before I do, there is one possible source of misunderstanding here that I would like to clear away. There is no doubt that there are a number of psychological states that lack any clear propositional content. I have already mentioned pain as a state that seems to have no such content, but mood might be another example – boredom and anxiety, for instance, need not have any specific object – while one might view perceptual states as similarly nonpropositional (although, as we shall see below, perceptual states are also the focus for a very specific line of argument here). It should be noted, however, that the fact that certain states lack any precise propositional content does not mean that they have no content, nor even that they have no content that is amenable to some propositional expression. Pain may not be a propositional state any more than having the visual experience of seeing a red patch, but both the experience of pain and the experience of seeing red may well be able to be given propositional expression (and such expression, it should be remembered, need not capture everything about the original experience – describing is not experiencing).

In this respect, it is not that every state that enters into the realm of the psychological need be a propositional state (ie a state that takes a proposition as its object), but rather than any state that enters into that realm, that enters in to the net of rationality, must be able to be given some sort of propositional expression or else be appropriately related to some state that can be propositionally expressed. Similarly, the fact that pain, and states like it, is not strictly speaking a 'rational' state, does not show that it thereby falls entirely outside of the rational structure of the psychological. Pain is not rational in the sense that one must have a reason to be in pain – one is merely caused to be so; but the experience of pain, or its

anticipation, may itself constitute a reason – my headache is the reason I refuse an invitation to the movies, my fear of the dentist’s drill is the reason I put off an appointment to have a tooth filled.

A number of philosophers have argued, however, that some states, particularly perceptual states, even if they may enter into rational connection with other states, have no propositional or conceptual content at all, but, instead, the content of those states is ‘non-conceptual’.⁹⁷ Those who argue in favor of the idea of nonconceptual content do not reject the idea that some content is conceptual or propositional, but rather claim that not all content is of that character, arguing for the existence of two kinds of content, the conceptual and the nonconceptual (the latter often understood by reference to the possession of capacities and skills rather than of concepts), and associated with those two kinds of content, two types of mental states or, as it is sometimes put, two modes by which we engage with the world.⁹⁸ Moreover, it is often claimed that the nonconceptual must have priority here over the conceptual, and even that the conceptual is largely irrelevant to our basic way of being in the world.⁹⁹ Such an account may be thought to raise a much more serious problem for the Davidsonian emphasis on the centrality of the propositional than might the ‘nonpropositional’ character of moods or pains. Moreover, Davidson seems, in any case, to have committed himself to a conceptual view of content, or, at least, to a conceptual view of the nature of thought. This was already evident, for instance, in his discussion of the case of non-human animals in ‘Thought and Talk’. Yet although the idea of a dichotomy between two kinds of content is certainly incompatible with the Davidsonian emphasis on propositionality, it is also incompatible with the holistic character of the psychological as such.

The psychological is, as we have already seen, constrained by the need for overall coherence between attitudes, and also between attitudes and behavior. Moreover, the interconnection that obtains with respect to the psychological realm also extends to encompass other speakers and agents, as well as the worldly objects and events to which those attitudes and that behavior is directed. When we interact with some object – when I pick up the coffee cup before me and drink, at the same time reflecting on my skill in so doing – there are not two sorts of content, nor two sorts of states or modes of engagement at work here. There is the one action and the one agent, and even though the action does not itself constitute a ‘belief’, even though it is not completely described by reference to any proposition or concept, even though it is possible without a set of skills and capacities that cannot be given any complete propositional account,

nevertheless, that does not mean that the action has no connection with our conceptual and propositionally-oriented capacities or that it cannot be given some propositional and conceptual expression. Moreover, if we want to understand how it is that the action and the rest of our psychology can cohere and connect, then it is precisely by reference to the idea of content, as that content is identified using propositions, that we must do so. The idea of content is just that which, inasmuch as it can carry over from one state or situation to another, thereby enables the connections between such states and situations to be mapped out. The integration of psychological is largely achieved and articulated (both our own case and that of others) through the integration of content by which the various states, acts and so forth are related. The content that is at issue here can only be content capable of propositional, or conceptual, characterisation.

Of course, we may wonder how there could be any other sort of content in the first place, since content would seem to be just that which is identified by means of some proposition or sentence.¹⁰⁰ But we can now see how the idea of content as propositional is, in fact, closely tied to the role of content in the integration and articulation of the psychological. Moreover, in seeing this, we can also see why language is so important to the capacity for the sort of complex attitudes and behavior that are associated with creatures like ourselves – such psychological complexity depends on the capacity for the interconnection between attitudes and behavior that is possible only by reference to propositional or linguistic content.

There is another way, however, in which some of the concerns that may be taken to underlie the argument for nonconceptual content may also be expressed – a way that might be thought more consistent with the holism developed here and that derives from an issue I touched on in §3.3.3 above, namely the inadequacy that is sometimes thought to attach to belief-desire psychology as such. The holistic nature of belief is such that any belief always presupposes further beliefs, but it also seems to presuppose many states that are not usually thought of as beliefs at all. Thus, my belief that Melbourne is southwest of Sydney may presuppose certain beliefs about the location of both Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, and yet it also presupposes, apart from anything else, a certain mastery of ideas to do with spatial location, as well as some mastery of language, indeed a whole set of skills and capacities would seem to be implicated. Recognition of this point leads John Searle to suggest that what is presupposed by a belief or an attitude or by any intentional state is of two kinds: ‘the Network’, which is the set of interconnected propositional attitudes or intentional states into which any particular state or attitude is integrated; and ‘the Background’,

which is a set of ‘pre-intentional’ and, we might say, nonpropositional capacities and practices.¹⁰¹ The idea of such a nonpropositional background would seem to have a clear precedent in phenomenological and hermeneutic thinking. Within the phenomenological tradition, in particular, something close to this idea has been the focus for a great deal of attention under the heading of the ‘life-world’ – a notion that appears in Husserl in its most developed form in the Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,¹⁰² that seems to be developed further in the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and also Alfred Schütz,¹⁰³ and that also appears to bear close similarities to the idea of ‘forms of life’ in Wittgenstein’s later work.¹⁰⁴ In all these cases we find that what I have called the ‘psychological’ cannot be understood in any way that renders it completely transparent or determinate – and often this is taken to mean that it cannot be rendered propositionally.

The sorts of considerations that can be found in Searle, and that are also to be found in Husserl and others, could themselves be taken to provide support for the idea of nonpropositional content discussed immediately above, if it were not for the fact that such a notion has already been shown to be problematic. Indeed, it is not so much its nonpropositionality that is really at issue in the idea of the Searlean ‘Background’ or the phenomenological ‘life-world’, but rather the indeterminate and incomplete character of the wider content against which particular beliefs, actions and so forth always stand, according to which the psychological realm can never be rendered in a completely transparent fashion (this is a major focus of discussion in §4.1.3 below). Nonetheless, such considerations might also be taken to show that if we want to understand the holistic structure of the psychological, then we cannot take beliefs, or other such propositional attitudes, as primary, since it is rather the practical, worldly context in which particular beliefs, desires and the rest are located that constitutes the proper structure of the psychological realm.

Of course, given the holistic account adopted here, there is no doubt that beliefs, and other propositional attitudes, cannot be understood independently of the wider context within which those beliefs are located – independently, that is, of the other beliefs and attitudes of the individual speaker to whom those beliefs belong, of the beliefs and attitudes of other speakers, or of the environment within which the speaker, and the others with whom she is engaged, is located. That this is so follows from the holistic account I have so far outlined, but it can also be seen to be implied by Davidson’s development of the idea of triangulation in which our own attitudes, those of others, and the objects and events that comprise our

physical environment are interconnected. Yet if we do think of beliefs and other attitudes in this way, then it also requires that we rethink the very character of such attitudes. Beliefs and other such attitudes cannot, on this account, be construed as discrete elements in the internal mental lives of agents nor can they be defined in terms of their relation to some 'internalised', mental 'object'. Indeed, Davidson is himself quite explicit in rejecting such a view of the propositional attitudes.¹⁰⁵ Beliefs are constituted as beliefs through the way in which speakers are related, as they are both causally affected and causally effecting, by way of both action and perception, to one another and to the world. Consequently, we should perhaps think of beliefs, and other such attitudes as more like habits, dispositions and modes of orientation and so as standing in a necessary relation to action and perception, to others and to the world.¹⁰⁶

This way of understanding the nature of beliefs and attitudes also enables us better to understand the role of propositions in relation to the attitudes. It is by reference to propositions or sentences that we are able to map out the complex structure of speakers' overall behavioral dispositions and orientations. Moreover, while propositions play an essential role in the mapping of such a structure, this does not mean that those propositions are somehow identical with or exhaustive of that structure. In the same way, we may use numerical values to map the relations between different objects in terms of weight or distance, for instance, and yet that does not mean that those relations are themselves to be simply identified with those numerical values.¹⁰⁷ Without the capacity to appeal to such numerical assignments, in the case of measurement, or to propositions, in the case of attitudes and behavior, we would be unable to map out the relations at issue in any significant fashion, and yet those relations, and the states of affairs or entities that are revealed in those relations (a particular temperature, weight, or attitude) are not themselves numbers or propositions. Thus, while Dreyfus is right that we cannot understand our involvement with the world in any purely 'theoretical' fashion, neither can that involvement be understood in a way that severs it from a necessary connection with the propositional. Similarly, while interpretation is about more than just beliefs and desires – it is a matter of exploring the interconnections between a whole range of attitudes, behavior, skills, moods and the rest, both in respect of individual speakers, as well as the wider community of speakers, and the environment in which they are located – interpretation can proceed only by mapping out the interconnections at issue here in propositional terms.

In this latter respect, it is worth noting that Davidsonian holism can be seen as itself leading to a certain form of externalism inasmuch as it challenges the usual separation between subjectivity and objectivity and it does this through its insistence on the way in which the elements that are normally taken to make up the subjective (the beliefs, desires and so forth of individual speakers or agents) are necessarily interconnected with those of other speakers as well as with the wider world – an interconnection that is articulated in and through the propositional, that is, through language. Holism thus forces us to the recognition that language, and along with language, the propositional, far from standing over against the world, is rather that within which the world, and all that it comprises, comes to appearance. Our involvement with the world, contrary to the claims of Dreyfus and others, is indeed fundamentally linguistic, as it is also fundamentally propositional, and yet this does not mean that our involvement is in any sense less ‘direct’ or ‘immediate’ or that it is, therefore, ‘representational’ in character: Thus Davidson writes in ‘Seeing Through Language’: Language is not a medium through which we see; it does not mediate between us and the world...Language does not mirror or represent reality, any more than our senses present us with no more than appearances... We perceive the world through language, that is, through having language.’¹⁰⁸

The Davidsonian position that I have set out here, is not, of course, idiosyncratic in this emphasis on the linguistic. Hans-Georg Gadamer also emphasizes the fundamentally linguistic character of all understanding, and, since he also emphasizes the universality of understanding in our involvement in the world, so he can also be seen as asserting the linguisticity of that involvement: ‘Being that can be understood’ says Gadamer ‘is language’.¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the other differences that are also present here, one might take Derrida’s oft-quoted comment ‘Il n’y a pas de hors – texte’ (‘there is nothing outside the text’)¹¹⁰ in a somewhat similar fashion. As Derrida himself points out, he does not intend, through such a comment, to transform the world into a library,¹¹¹ since there is no single text, nor even a body of texts, that is the world. Instead, he aims to point to the ‘textual’ character of our involvement with the world – an involvement that is no longer on the simple model of inner subjectivity confronting an objective outside. Reality is itself textual, but its textuality does not mean that it is something subjective. As Gasché points out, there is nothing outside the text, but nothing inside it either.¹¹² The inner-outer opposition – the

opposition between subjectivity and objectivity – is itself collapsed by Derrida, along with the idea that there is any absolute determinacy to such oppositions or that they express some final reality or essence.

This latter point – that the world cannot be conceived of as pure objectivity in contrast with a psychological realm conceived in terms of subjectivity – will become increasingly crucial to my own account of Davidsonian holism. It is a matter on which I shall touch briefly in this chapter (see §3.4.5) and in chapter four (§4.2.5), but that will be central to the discussions in Part III. For the moment I would merely note that, while Davidson certainly makes use of the distinction between speaker and environment in his own thinking (and the distinction is one that I endorse), and while he sometimes presents that distinction in terms of a contrast between the speaker and an ‘outside world’, he nevertheless does not treat that distinction as providing any basis for a clear separation between speaker and environment. Indeed, he has, in a number of papers, explicitly rejected any conception of the relation between speaker and environment in terms of the relation between an inner subjectivity and outer objectivity.¹¹³ In this respect, then, Derridaen textualism turns out to be not too far removed from Davidsonian holism.

3.4.2 The idea of a person

Interpretation is a matter of seeing the speaker in relation to the world in which that speaker is located; with which the speaker is involved. For the phenomenologist, that means locating the speaker, ultimately, with respect to the wider context that is the life-world. For the semiotician, the relationship could be said to be one of signification – a relation between sign-systems which themselves involve more than just the linguistic. On the holistic account given here, the relationship between speaker and world is not primarily epistemic, nor can it be construed in primarily representational terms, and this is so even given the central role of propositions and prepositional attitudes in that relationship. Consequently, interpretation operates at a level that involves more than just the propositional attitudes, but encompasses the whole range of potential meaning. The thesis of interpretative or psychological holism is, thus, as we have already seen, not just a thesis that concerns only belief and desire, but a thesis in which the fundamental idea might be said to be the idea of the speaker or agent, that is, the person, as a unity (albeit an imperfect unity) of behavior, attitude, feeling, capacity and so forth located within a shared world of objects, events and other

persons. Notice that the notion is not a notion of subjectivity, but already involves notions of both intersubjectivity, and, let us say, 'inter-objectivity' (insofar as it sees the person as involved with a network of other persons and objects, events etc.).

Of course, the same holistic constraints must apply whether it is beliefs and desires with which we are concerned, or whether it is the whole range of attitudes, abilities and the rest. This is, indeed, just what is suggested by using the notion of 'person' in this context. A person is the primary psychological unit insofar as the attribution of particular attitudes, utterances, behavior, abilities or feelings to the same person requires that those attitudes, utterances and so forth exhibit an appropriate degree of consistency and interconnection. Being a person is a matter of manifesting the appropriate interconnection between one's behavior, one's attitudes and the rest of one's psychology. And, unless such interconnection is manifest, there will be no possibility of attributing attitudes or making psychological attributions of any other sort in the first place – at least not in any fully-fledged sense. One important feature of this notion of person-hood is that it allows that the individuation and identity of persons may sometimes be indeterminate. For it is at least conceivable that one might reinterpret an array of attitudes and behavior in such a way that what one had assumed to be a single psychological whole turned out to break down into two (or more) such unities. Thus questions of personal identity may not always be capable of a unique answer.¹¹⁴

In attempting to solve questions of personal identity we often look, not only to psychological unity (either at a time or over time), but also to bodily unity. And there is good reason for this. Bodily unity (and by this I mean the unity and integration of physical movements as much as the integration of actual bodily parts) is the physical representation of psychological unity. As Wittgenstein puts it 'The human body is the best picture of the human soul'.¹¹⁵ The unity of the person is thus a unity of 'mind in body'. But as the many discussions of this issue have shown, settling the question of bodily identity will not resolve every question of personal identity. What is true, however, is that bodily location is a necessary condition for attributions of personhood. This is because the notion of a person is tied to the idea of involvement or location in the world, and to be located or involved in this way is just to be embodied. The thesis of psychological holism thus leads us to conclude that embodiment is not an accidental aspect of personhood – rather the two are necessarily tied together.¹¹⁶ Of course, this does not mean that any specific form of embodiment is necessary. Since embodiment is largely a matter of worldly location, the form of

embodiment turns out to be largely irrelevant. There seems no reason to suppose that embodiment need only be in flesh and bone, or that it could not equally well be in metal and plastic.

3.4.3 Person and world

That the notion of a person presupposes location in a world, and hence embodiment in some form, was suggested by comments I made earlier. Interpreting a speaker presupposes the location of that speaker within a world of objects and events. Without such location the speaker cannot be interpreted at all, and thus cannot be understood as a person. That interpretation does presuppose such integration of the speaker with his or her environment is a point that is made fairly explicit in Davidson's own account of the interpretative process: '[one] interprets sentences held true (which is not to be distinguished from attributing beliefs) according to the events and objects in the outside world that cause the sentence to be held true'.¹¹⁷ Thus, in the simplest interpretative situations, one generally takes the utterance of a speaker to be the expression of some true belief of the speaker that refers to some aspect of the speaker's environment. Just what object or event the interpreter takes the speaker as referring to is, of course, a matter of the interpreter's understanding of the speaker's other attitudes and psychology. Nevertheless, it is only by matching the utterances of a speaker to the speaker's environment that interpretation can go ahead at all. This is the correlate of the claim that most of a speaker's beliefs must be true: just as overall truth is required to preserve the connections within the psychological realm, so also would the lack of any overall correlation between a speaker's beliefs and the objects and events in that speaker's environment undermine the possibility of identifying the speaker's beliefs, or of making sense of the speaker as a speaker. This does not rule out the possibility that some of a speaker's beliefs may fail to accurately match with any aspect of the speaker's environment, just as it does not rule out the possibility that some of a speaker's beliefs may be false. But it does rule out the possibility of any widespread separation (epistemic or otherwise) of the speaker from her environment. (In this respect it rules out any form of global skepticism, as we shall see later, in chapter six, §6.3.)

Of course, insofar as it rules out the possibility of such a separation, so it seems also to rule out any possibility of persons existing as disembodied Cartesian egos. Such a possibility would involve nothing less than the idea that persons were primarily pure psychological unities distinct and separable from any

physical location or embodiment. In that case, one could conceive of a possible realm in which there existed only pure disembodied egos – psychological unities without physical location, unrelated to any physical objects or events. But, given the interpretative considerations I have cited here, and given also the holistic conception of the relation between attitudes and behavior, and between psychology and physical environment, such a possibility can now be seen to be especially problematic. For it involves the idea of an ego that, insofar as it is disembodied, is always unlocated and unlocatable – an ego that is thus unrelated to any common world of objects and events. Not only would such an entity be likely to have an extremely impoverished mental life (and that, after all, would be the only life it had), but since a disembodied ego would lack such location within the world, and would also lack any relation to other entities within the world, so it is difficult to see how such an ego could be made the subject of interpretation. It could not be understood by others, since the fact of its disembodiment would sever it from the usual web of connections by means of which interpretation is made possible. But if it could not be understood by others, I doubt that such an ego could even begin to understand itself. And this is because the preconditions of understanding are essentially the same no matter who we interpret – whether it be ourselves or others.¹¹⁸

Whatever the conclusions on the possibility of disembodied existence, it is nevertheless true that any set of attitudes that is sufficiently rich and complex in terms of its content will necessarily presuppose some worldly location and connection between psychological attitudes, and physical objects and events. Moreover, in making the world-to-speaker connections that are so important in interpreting the utterances of speakers, one is also effectively connecting beliefs with other beliefs. For, in matching some truth about the speaker's environment with a belief held by the speaker, the interpreter is also matching the speaker's belief with a belief that the interpreter also holds. The objects and events with which a speaker's utterances must be correlated is thus a world that must be common both to speaker and interpreter. As Davidson comments:

To understand the speech of another, I must be able to think of the same things she does; I must share her world ... communication depends, then, on each communicant having, and correctly thinking that the other has, the concept of a shared, an intersubjective world. But the concept of an intersubjective world is the concept of an objective world, a world about which each communicant can have beliefs.¹¹⁹

The presupposition of a common world is presented by Davidson as embodied in the principle of charity itself. Thus he writes that charity (or the principle of rational accommodation) is ‘a way of expressing the fact that creatures with thoughts, values and speech must be rational creatures, are necessarily inhabitants of the same objective world as ourselves, and necessarily share their leading values with us’.¹²⁰ This is also an important element in the idea of triangulation.¹²¹ Davidson’s comments here, however, only serve to make clear the central importance of the idea of a common world – albeit, of course, a world that is always amenable to many different, but compatible, descriptions. What remains unexplained is the nature of such a common, objective world. While I have already provided some hints as to the direction I will take here, further elaboration of that notion will have to wait until chapter four (see §4.3.2).

3.4.4 The presupposition of community

The holism of the psychological realm forces us to presuppose a common world in which both speaker and interpreter are located. The world is thus always implicated in any exploration of the psychological realm. Indeed, my own use of the term ‘psychological’ here is perhaps misleading, for the ‘psychological realm’ as I have presented it is not a subjective realm it is not a realm ‘inside the head’ or even just a realm of behavior. The ‘psychological realm’ is the realm of the world itself, not because the world is itself ‘idea’, or ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’, but because the world is always implicated in the psychological. In more mundane terms, we can say that the articulation of a speaker’s psychology presupposes the interpreter’s knowledge of the world, and that the articulation of one’s understanding of a speaker is also an articulation of one’s understanding of the world and of one’s own psychology – but there is more here also. For the above quotation suggests that Davidson himself sees interpretation as presupposing more than just a common world – it also assumes a common background of rationality and shared belief between speaker and interpreter. So just as the notion of a person – conceived as a creature capable of belief, speech and so forth – presupposes the notion of a world in which that person is located, so too does it imply the notion of a form of community.

Indeed, the claim that beliefs, attitudes and behavior form an interconnected whole is not a claim that is simply about the mental life of individual persons; it is also a claim about the nature of belief,

attitude and behavior in general. Beliefs and so forth are only to be identified against a background of other attitudes and behavior. Consequently, if we are to attribute a particular belief to a speaker, then the attribution of that belief presupposes its integration with beliefs that we also possess. Where the belief is one with which we disagree, such integration is achieved through being able to explain how such a belief could come to be held – we can understand how we ourselves might come to believe such a thing if we were in similar circumstances. If such integration with our own beliefs did not obtain, then it would be unclear just what belief had been attributed. For we are the ones making the attribution, and such attribution requires our identification of the attributed belief. Such identification in turn requires that the belief concerned be integrated with beliefs that we hold. The situation is exactly similar to the situation involving translation. Translation of an utterance requires that we match up the speaker's utterance with an utterance of our own, and so identifying a belief requires that we match the belief-state of the speaker with some belief that we ourselves actually hold or could come to hold. Of course, attributing a belief to a speaker also requires integration with the other beliefs of the speaker, and, in fact, the attribution of a particular belief will always carry with it the attribution of an associated network of beliefs. Thus, in attributing a belief, we also project onto the speaker many other beliefs.

What this account of the way we interpret others suggests is that we are really required to treat, not just our own psychology or the psychology of another speaker holistically. We are required to treat the set of all speakers, including ourselves, in the same integrated, holistic fashion: as participants in the same unitary structure of attitude, behavior and so forth. It is perhaps most natural to express this aspect of holism by saying that the process of communication between speakers both presupposes and provides an articulation of the community to which such speakers must belong in much the same way as it also both presupposes and provides an articulation of the world in which speakers are located. The notion of community thus represents the inter-personal extension of the original holism thesis as applied to individuals. This extension of holism to include speakers in general is, indeed, one way of understanding the purpose of the principle of charity in interpretation. So Frederick Stoutland notes that 'the principle of charity makes no distinction between beliefs about oneself and beliefs about others'.¹²² Charity is the methodological expression of the presupposition of the community of speakers. It might also be seen as expressing the idea that there is no privileged interpretative position.¹²³ Instead, all interpretation is a matter

of integrating one's own attitudes and behavior with that of the community of speakers. Thus, no one individual has priority, and no particular set of attitudes or particular code of behavior can be taken as authoritative.¹²⁴

The idea that understanding does involve treating our own psychology, and that of other speakers, holistically – that it involves bringing them into some sort of coherence – may seem bizarre at first, but it has its echoes elsewhere. Indeed, it has been made a central idea of the hermeneutic theory of H.-G. Gadamer. In Truth and Method, Gadamer presents interpretation as involving a 'fusion of horizons' between interpreter and speaker¹²⁵ in which interpreter and speaker come together in a form of communion. The basic idea that interpretation and understanding is a matter of unification between differing 'horizons' seems to be common to both Gadamer, and, in a less explicit and developed way, to Davidson. In the project of interpretation, interpreter and speaker come together in an agreement that is both presupposed by, and the product of, the interpretative project itself. In interpretation (and in any act of communication), interpreter and speaker thus come to articulate an agreement that was previously assumed but unarticulated.

Insofar as Gadamer works within a broadly phenomenological tradition, so his work is very strongly influenced by the ideas of Edmund Husserl. And thus it is not surprising to find, once again, that the ideas of the community of speakers and the common world within which they are located also have their parallels in Husserl. For the later Husserl especially, the individual is always already both in the world and in a community with others. So, in The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, where Husserl asks how it is possible for each individual subject to possess both a consciousness of self and a consciousness of the world, he replies that in fact 'self-consciousness and consciousness of others are inseparable' and consciousness of others is itself implicated in consciousness of the world.¹²⁶ Thus the process of phenomenological reduction turns out not to be a reduction of individual consciousness, but a reduction that reveals a 'single unity of intentionality.'¹²⁷ What remains after the reduction is 'not a multiplicity of separated souls, each reduced to its pure interiority, but rather: just as there is a sole universal nature as a self-enclosed framework of unity, so there is a sole psychic framework, a total framework of all souls, which are united not externally, but internally, namely through the intentional interpenetration which is the communalization of their lives.'¹²⁸

The comparison with Husserl here is an important one, quite independently of the interest in finding some precedent for the theses that follow from psychological holism, because of the use I intend to make of Husserlian notions in chapter four to illuminate and develop the Davidsonian position. The same is true of the connections that can be drawn here with Gadamer. For not only does Gadamer represent a philosopher within the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition whose ideas about interpretation and understanding are often close to Davidson's, but he makes use of certain central notions to which I also will appeal. In particular, the notion of 'horizon' that Gadamer employs (a notion that derives from Husserl and Heidegger) will be an essential component in my own account of the holistic nature of the psychological, and of the structure of interpretation, as developed in chapter four. In this respect, one could say that much of my discussion in this book is actually aimed at leading the Davidsonian account in a more hermeneutic or phenomenological direction.

One way of expressing the idea of the prior but unarticulated agreement that is presupposed by interpretation is in terms of a community of speakers such as that briefly mentioned above. It is also expressed in the associated notion (a notion already encountered above) of a common world. As we have seen, this latter notion certainly appears explicitly in both Davidson and in Gadamer,¹²⁹ though perhaps in slightly different forms in each case. The idea of a common world is also found in Husserl, where it is tied to the idea of a single integrated structure of consciousness. In general, the presupposition of agreement that is involved here, insofar as it bears on the project of interpretation, is expressed in Davidsonian terms in the principle of charity, that is, in the injunction that we should assume agreement between ourselves and those we interpret. Taken as an expression of the presupposition of community and of the commonality of the world, charity does indeed involve an emphasis on agreement; taken as an expression of the presupposition of speakers' necessary involvement with an objective world, it involves an emphasis on truth. Both aspects of the principle appear in Davidson, and both can be seen as equally significant ways of stating the requirement of charity. Triangulation, which encompasses both our relations with others and our relations with the objects and events that make up the world, similarly captures, in this fashion, both agreement and truth. No matter whether we speak of charity or triangulation here, however, the point is that interpretation, and the psychological as such, necessarily implicates, and is implicated with, community and world. Davidson neatly summarizes the overall position when he writes: 'Our thoughts neither create the

world nor simply picture it; they are tied to their external sources from the beginning; those sources being the community and the environment we know we jointly occupy'.¹³⁰

3.4.5 Holism and 'individualism'

Holism operates, as we have seen, at a number of levels – at the level of particular sets of attitudes, behavior and so forth (within what I shall later come to term particular 'horizons' and with respect to particular 'projects') – and not at any one level alone. Of course, the attempt to interpret individual speakers is typically at the forefront of our interpretative endeavors; for it is individual speakers that we confront. Thus, the encounter with individuals is in a certain sense primary in the process of interpretation. But such primacy does not mean that other elements are excluded. Indeed, both the wider community and more localized psychological structures are implicated in the project of the interpretation of an individual speaker.

This point bears directly on one possible criticism of the Davidsonian conception of the nature of interpretation. For Davidson's account of radical interpretation may be thought to have too strong an individualistic bias. Thus, in the paper 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs, Davidson might be seen as arguing for the primacy of idiolect over dialect – for the primacy of individualistic theories of interpretation over more general or collectivist accounts.¹³¹ Such a criticism is one that David Lewis makes of his own account of radical interpretation – an account that, when it originally appeared, Davidson largely endorsed.¹³² Lewis writes that 'I stated my problem in an unduly individualistic way; given the facts about Karl as a physical system, solve for the facts about him as a person – his beliefs, desires, and meanings. If Karl were a unique being, this would be the right question to ask. If not – if he is, for instance, human – it is not.'¹³³ But Davidson has never couched his account of interpretation in quite the same strongly individualistic language employed by Lewis in his original paper. Moreover, if the account of holism that I have been developing here is even partially mirrored in Davidson's own holistic approach, then it must be obvious that Lewis' worries cannot properly apply to Davidson. The problem with Lewis' original account is, indeed, that it is simply not holistic enough: it fails to take adequate notice of the integration of the individual speaker with the wider community of which he or she is necessarily a part.

The Davidsonian account that I have set out so far is one that actually undermines the idea that interpretation can be pursued with a narrowly individualistic focus.¹³⁴ Yet it also suggests that psychology in general, and not merely linguistic interpretation, cannot be pursued in terms of the investigation of individual mental states, or even of the mental states of types or species of individuals. For, as I discussed above, the individual cannot be understood as separate from the world, or the community in which she is located. The conclusion we are driven to is that the psychological realm cannot be understood as a realm independent of, or wholly separable from, the worldly and social surroundings with respect to which individuals are located. Parallels to this conclusion, in varying degrees of proximity, can be found in the work of an increasing number of philosophers who have argued that there are, indeed, serious problems with any attempt to understand psychological states independently of their connections with the wider social and physical environment in which the individual psychological subject is placed. Thus Hilary Putnam has argued that “meanings” just ain’t in the head’.¹³⁵ And, as Phillip Pettit and John McDowell comment, one way to take Putnam’s point here is to conclude that ‘We can no longer regard the social and physical environment as simply surrounding the psychological subject. Rather, we have to accept that contextual facts inextricably permeate the field of psychological investigation, even when what is under study is the psychological organization of an individual.’¹³⁶ Pettit and McDowell point out that this idea has its origins not only in Putnam’s work, but also in ideas developed by Tyler Burge,¹³⁷ as well as in some of Wittgenstein’s comments on rule-following and the possibility of a private language.¹³⁸ Such externalism is a central element in Davidson’s thinking, although it is developed there in rather more radical form, as should be evident from the discussion here, than is typical of the externalism of writers such as Putnam or Burge (indeed, one might regard Davidson as the most important proponent of a strong externalist position). I would also argue that a similar externalism, although it is not always identified as such, is an important element in the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. Indeed, the externalism that is evident in their work seems much closer to that to be found in Davidson.¹³⁹

It is worth noting, perhaps, that many have taken the work of Putnam, Burge and others as demonstrating the inadequacy of any reductionist approach in the philosophy of mind, thus reinforcing the point made earlier that such approaches are incompatible with holism. Davidson himself comments that:

I think Putnam, Burge, Dennett, Fodor, Stich, and others are right in calling attention to the fact that ordinary mental states ... are partly identified by relations to society and the rest of the environment ... They are also right ... in holding that for this reason (if for no other), the concepts of 'folk psychology' [the ordinary, 'commonsense', psychology of beliefs, desires, etc.] cannot be incorporated into a comprehensive system of laws of the sort for which physics strives.¹⁴⁰

The problem is that, if psychological states do implicate a wider social and environmental context, then it seems that it will be impossible to understand the psychological independently of that wider context.

Putnam, who is often credited as the first to expound the functionalist position, has himself cited the fact that psychological states seem to be necessarily embedded in a wider social and environmental context as one of his main reasons for abandoning functionalism altogether.¹⁴¹ The problem, as Putnam identifies it, is that, if psychological states cannot be identified without reference to external social and environmental factors, then:

The upshot of our discussion for the philosophy of mind is that propositional attitudes ... are not states of the human brain and nervous system considered in isolation from the social and nonhuman environment. A fortiori, they are not 'functional states' ... Functionalism, construed as the thesis that propositional attitudes are just computational states of the brain, cannot be correct [italics in the original].¹⁴²

However, if psychological holism is correct, then it presents a problem for functionalism, not because psychological states are not states of the brain and nervous system (they may well be that, if Davidson's anomalous monism is correct), but because any move that eliminates talk of beliefs, desires and so forth in favor of functionalist or physicalist language, moves us out of the holistic framework of the psychological – a framework that extends to include the wider environment of the speaker – into a much narrower realm in which the proper holism of the psychological cannot be preserved.¹⁴³

4. Indeterminacy and psychological structure

In the previous chapter, I set out an account of the holistic character of the psychological that was grounded in Davidson's account of interpretation, but that also attempted to develop that account in a more explicit and integrated fashion. As the last chapter took up the notion of holism in Davidson, so the present chapter moves on to develop the notion of indeterminacy. The indeterminacy thesis consists in the claim that there is always more than one equally acceptable way of attributing attitudes, assigning meanings and identifying actions. This is, in some respects, the notion that has received least discussion in Davidson's work, and certainly Davidson puts less emphasis on the idea than does Quine. In fact, as I suggested earlier, there is a certain lack of clarity in some of Davidson's discussion of the indeterminacy thesis, mainly inasmuch as he sometimes seems to treat it simply as a matter of the availability of multiple descriptions, rather than as a consequence of the holistic character of interpretation. In my own account the indeterminacy of interpretation is treated as a much more significant notion that is inseparable from the thesis of psychological holism. Indeed, the consideration of indeterminacy will lead me to look more closely at the structure of the psychological realm itself. An account will be developed in which indeterminacy is seen in the light of what I shall call the 'intentional-horizonal' structure of the psychological according to which the psychological is seen as organized around particular projects and within particular localities. This structure will also be applied to interpretation itself. Thus, as I develop the idea of indeterminacy, I will also provide further elaboration of the thesis of psychological holism and of the dynamic structure of interpretation.

4.1 The indeterminacy and incompleteness of interpretation

4.1.1 The origins of indeterminacy

The psychological realm is characterized by the holistic interrelation of its parts. Indeed, each of those parts is constituted by its connections with others – the psychological realm is thus, in Saussurean terms, a system of differences. Such holism is a feature of the psychological in general. The fact that the psychological is structured in this way means that beliefs must always be considered in relation to other attitudes and behavior, and individual persons must be considered in relation to other persons and to their environment. Not only are beliefs, meanings and

behavior interconnected, but so too are persons, the community and the world. It might be supposed that, given such interconnection, the task of interpretation is simply to chart out the networks involved here. This would be to assume that the psychological realm, holistically structured though it is, could nevertheless be treated as a static, if complex, system of interconnections that could, at least in part, be laid out before us. To conceive of the psychological realm in this way, however, would be to radically misunderstand the nature of the holism that characterizes it.

The holism of the psychological realm carries with it a radical indeterminacy that is not simply a matter of our being able to describe psychological phenomena in more than one way. And although, in Quine, indeterminacy might be regarded, in keeping with the focus on translation, as primarily a linguistic thesis, in Davidson it has to be more than just this, for the Davidsonian project encompasses much more than just linguistic behavior. The indeterminacy that follows from holism is not merely an indeterminacy of translation, but of interpretation – it encompasses not merely the linguistic, but the psychological in general.¹ In its simplest form the indeterminacy thesis is expressed in the claim that there will always be more than one correct way of interpreting the behavior and attitudes of a speaker. Thus, there will never be one uniquely correct way of assigning attitudes or interpreting behavior. If it were possible to take the psychological realm as a whole to be the object of interpretation, then there would necessarily be more than one theory that would accurately describe that realm. This indeterminacy is, of course, recognized by Davidson, even if it is sometimes, perhaps, misidentified by him – it is, as I noted in chapter two, part of his Quinean heritage. But while Davidson himself seems almost to treat it as a carry-over from Quine, the indeterminacy thesis is in fact intrinsic to the Davidsonian position. It follows, as I pointed out earlier, from the holistic character of the psychological; more specifically, it follows from what I shall call the ‘interpretative closure’ of the psychological.

Each element of the psychological – each belief, capacity or whatever – is individuated only in terms of its relations with other elements. This is merely to restate the holism thesis itself. Yet, in addition, there is nothing outside or independent of the network that could determine those relations. That attitudes and behavior can only be determined in relation to other attitudes and behavior is indeed the primary barrier to any attempt at reduction of the psychological to the non-psychological. Certainly we might look to the physical causes of belief in trying to determine what beliefs are about – this is something Davidson himself suggests.² But such a strategy is possible only because we can typically take the speaker’s relation to her environment to be reflected in the speaker’s beliefs,

and because we can use our own beliefs about the speaker's relation to the environment as a basis for attributing beliefs to the speaker.

Thus we can use the physical causes of belief as a guide (though not an infallible guide³) to the objects of beliefs because of our own beliefs about those causes. So we look to our sightings of rabbits in the vicinity to explain the speaker's cries of 'Gavagai!' – we may even be able to connect the speaker's excitement at the presence of rabbits with the hunger of which the speaker had earlier been complaining. We can do this on the basis of beliefs we have about the edibility of rabbit meat, and, perhaps, on the basis of other beliefs we have formed about the culinary habits of the speaker. But any such interpretation arises within a wider context of belief and attitude. The fact that, in the case of a particular speaker, a causal connection holds between an object and a belief is part of the evidence on which the speaker is interpreted. But the evidential role of that connection is dependent on the overall interpretative framework within which the causal connection is placed. It does not provide some special access to the beliefs of speakers independent of the holism of the psychological – this is evident in the fact that any such connection will always be taken up under a description'. Another way of putting this point might be to say that our only access to the world and to other speakers is interpretative (or that all such access is already textual or semiotic). As such, it is the holism of interpretation and of the psychological that is fundamental here. In general then, there is nothing independent of, or outside of, the psychological realm on which interpretation could be based. In this sense the psychological realm is interpretatively 'closed' or self-contained, even though, as Davidson has emphasized, the mental realm is causally open to the non-mental.⁴

It is the interpretative closure of the psychological realm, itself a consequence of the holism that obtains here, that leads directly to the indeterminacy of the psychological. For such closure has the consequence that even were it possible to fix the values for all the variables of attitude and behavior for an individual speaker at once (and whether this is possible is dubious, as I shall discuss shortly) there would still be no reason to prefer that assignment of values over some other assignments. There will always be other assignments of values that will equally well preserve the overall integration of the network; and there is no independent basis to prefer one assignment of values to another so long as both maintain that network in an equally consistent and integrated form. Thus, as Davidson puts it: 'Total theories are what we must construct, and many theories will do equally well.'⁵ This is, of course, a familiar point in literary and artistic criticism. There is always more than one way of reading any literary or artistic work – think, for instance, of the varying interpretations of almost any of Shakespeare's works – while those

readings remain readings of one and the same work. The same point applies to our readings of those people whom we encounter in everyday life. The reading we give to the behavior of those around us not a matter of trying to recapture some intrinsic meaning held 'within' their actions or their minds, but rather of understanding the way in which particular actions and attitudes are inter-related with other actions and attitudes, and so also with the wider environment, as well as with our own situation.

This sort of indeterminacy might be thought to be primarily an epistemological problem. It might be thought to arise simply out of holism as a methodological thesis. This would be to misunderstand the position. The holism thesis, as we saw in the last chapter, has both a methodological and a constitutive aspect. It concerns both our theorizing about the psychological as well as the very nature of the psychological itself. So it is not just that our understanding of the psychological is holistically constrained – the psychological realm itself is so constrained. It is indeed the essentially holistic nature of the psychological that determines our understanding of the psychological. Constitutive holism is what gives rise to methodological holism – since our theorizing is itself part of the psychological, so methodological holism is merely an instance of constitutive holism. Similarly, while the indeterminacy thesis can be seen as a methodological or epistemological thesis – a thesis about the non-uniqueness of any particular psychological theory – it is also a thesis about the nature of the psychological itself. Indeterminacy is a consequence of constitutive holism about the psychological. If constitutive holism leads to closure, as I argued above, then indeterminacy at the level of actual psychology is inevitable. For not only is there nothing outside the psychological on which to base interpretation, but there is nothing outside the psychological to determine the relations within it. Those relations are only to be determined by other relations internal to the psychological realm. In this respect, the psychological realm reflects, at a more general level, the structure of language as described by Saussure.

4.1.2 Indeterminacy and 'first-person authority'

This account of the origins of indeterminacy does not appear in Davidson or in Quine. It does, however, follow from the construal of Davidsonian holism offered here. And, while Davidson himself seems to conceive of indeterminacy as having a less radical import than I have suggested, he nevertheless insists, as does Quine, that indeterminacy is a quite general feature of the mental realm. Of course, it might be objected that, if the indeterminacy thesis is taken to be as general as this, then it must clearly be false. This is because it might seem that there is an obvious counter-

example: indeterminacy simply does not apply in our own case – in the first person. And if it does not apply in our own case then it cannot apply in any case.

Although we need to be mindful of the lessons of Freud, it seems true to say that, at a certain level, we can each be said to know what our words mean, and, therefore, to know what we believe, desire and so on. Such a claim might be supported by noting the asymmetry between the authority we have in self-ascriptions of attitudes and the authority others have in ascribing attitudes to us. It is an asymmetry that derives from the fact that speakers must always, or almost always, be assumed to know what their words mean. This is because the possibility of understanding a speaker's words must depend on those words constituting a meaningful utterance, a meaningful utterance must be an intentional one, and speakers must speak with some knowledge of their intentions for they must employ utterances appropriate to those intentions.⁶ Thus we might conclude that, since we each speak with knowledge of what we mean, and since indeterminacy seems to rule this out, there cannot be any real indeterminacy of interpretation.

There is a difference, however, between the claim that we know what we mean in speaking and the claim that our utterances are immune from indeterminacy. Even our own attitudes and utterances are subject to interpretation – whether by ourselves or others. As Davidson comments: 'though he can often say what is on his mind, an agent's words have meaning in the public domain; what his words mean is up to the interpreter as well as to him. How he is to be understood is a problem for him as it is for others.'⁷ Our attitudes and utterances are completely transparent neither to ourselves nor to others; they do not possess any greater determinacy than do the attitudes and utterances of other speakers. Yet this does not mean that a speaker can never get her own self-interpretations right. What it does mean is that, as we saw when the indeterminacy of interpretation was first introduced in chapter two, there will always be more than one way of interpreting. So we can know what we mean, and yet this need not imply that there is only one sense or meaning to our words. Indeed this point applies quite generally: if interpretation is indeterminate, then this means that there is more than one correct way of interpreting, but it does not mean that there is no correct way. Indeterminacy does not rule out the possibility of knowledge or correct understanding. Nor does it rule out the possibility that we can get things right. What it does mean is that there will be more ways of being right than just one. Such indeterminacy is not removed by the authority that a speaker might be said to have with respect to her utterances. Yet, if such 'first-person' authority is compatible with indeterminacy, it may well be incompatible with another consequence of the holistic approach I have been

discussing: in particular, with the claim that the psychological states of a speaker can never be understood independently of the wider social and environmental circumstances of the speaker. Surely it is possible that speakers may be ignorant of some aspects of that wider context such that they may also be ignorant of what they mean, believe, fear and so forth. This is certainly a possibility that has worried Davidson.⁸ Such a possibility seems, however, to depend on a number of questionable assumptions. Davidson himself identifies some of them in 'Knowing One's Own Mind'.⁹ But what primarily concerns me here is the degree to which this possibility might be thought to follow from holism. In fact, it turns out not to follow from holism at all, but, in some respects, is actually anti-holistic.

Certainly, if what we mean and believe is solely, or even primarily, determined by the relations between beliefs and utterances and objects and events in the world, or by the linguistic conventions in a speech community, then we may indeed turn out to be ignorant of what we mean or believe, just insofar as we may be ignorant or mistaken about those objects and events or about linguistic conventions. Yet the idea that beliefs – or meanings, or hopes or fears – are to be identified in this way does not seem to allow for the fact that beliefs, meanings and so forth are constrained by requirements of rationality. As Davidson comments, in discussing Tyler Burge: 'Thoughts are not independent atoms and so there can be no single, rigid, rule for the attribution of a single thought.'¹⁰

To allow that external factors are the over-riding determinants in what we believe and mean would be to treat the psychological atomistically rather than holistically – to treat thoughts as 'independent atoms'. It would mean that what we believed in a particular case, or what we meant by a particular utterance, was determined solely by the relation between the belief or utterance and objects or events in the world, independently of the relations between those beliefs and utterances and the rest of the speaker's psychology. While the relation between, for instance, beliefs and objects in the world is important in determining what those beliefs are about, that is so only against the background of the overall holism of the psychological. Indeed, the only access we have to the psychological is holistic – there is no way of gaining access to the psychological through some single point of connection between belief and world.

The holism that constrains interpretation, but that also makes it possible, includes external factors – the speaker's environment – as well as the speaker's past history and other beliefs, utterances, actions and attitudes of the speaker. There is no reason to suppose that the idea of first-person authority is compromised by holism of this sort. Indeed the authority that we have in identifying our own beliefs and meanings is, to a certain extent, an aspect

of the unity and integration of the psychological itself insofar as it is organized, at one level, around the individual person. The authority we have in respect of our own psychological states can thus be seen to mirror our own psychological unity as persons.

4.1.3 The impossibility of a 'total' theory

The unity of the psychological goes together with the indeterminacy of the psychological according to which there will always be more than one way of describing any part of the psychological realm. Such indeterminacy means that, if any general description of the psychological realm is possible, there will always be more than one way of so describing it. This latter point, however, turns out to be somewhat irrelevant, for, on the account developed here, it is not possible to provide any description of the psychological in its entirety. Thus interpretation is not merely indeterminate, it is also always incomplete. No theory of interpretation can provide a complete account of the psychological. Davidson's talk about the need to construct 'total' theories, whether one or many, is, in this respect, somewhat misleading. For such talk seems to presuppose that we can indeed fix the values for all psychological variables. But there is no way of giving values for all the variables of attitude, behavior and so forth, because, given the interpretative closure of the psychological realm (a closure that we have already seen gives rise to indeterminacy), there is no independent, outside standpoint from which such a 'total' theory could be advanced. Any attempt to interpret the psychological has to be located within that very realm.

This can be seen very clearly in the fact that the interpreter is herself necessarily implicated in the interpretative process. In the project of interpretation the interpreter's own beliefs and attitudes are implicated even in the interpretation of another speaker. This is so if only because we must assume that the speaker we are engaged with does share similar beliefs to ourselves. In speaking to my greengrocer about the variations in different varieties of apple, my ability to interpret her utterances depends on beliefs that I hold about the green and red objects that lie before us, about the likely past and future histories of those objects, about the interests and beliefs of the greengrocer, and about my own intentions and preferences. Some of these beliefs may well be made explicit in the course of some particular encounter, but most of them will, inevitably, remain implicit and unexamined. They will stand outside, or on the periphery, of that particular interpretative project. Insofar as a large body of beliefs and attitudes provide the basis on which interpretation is possible, so they cannot themselves be made the object of interpretative investigation. For these sorts of reasons, one cannot properly conceive of the psychological realm as a

whole being the object of interpretation. There is no way of making the entire psychological realm – inclusive of both speaker and interpreter – self-transparent.

The impossibility of ever being able to provide a complete account of the psychological realm might seem to conflict with the requirements of methodological holism. That is, it might seem to conflict with the requirement that the interpretation of speakers be directed towards the development of overall theories for those speakers. The simplest way of dealing with this apparent problem is to take the injunction to construct ‘total’ theories as a requirement that theory construction should always attempt to take account of as much of the interpretative evidence as possible. Thus interpretative theories should be addressed to the evidence as a whole. Of course, what counts as part of the body of relevant evidence will itself be determined by the interpretative project in which we are engaged. But holism is also maintained, not through any attempt to satisfy the requirement to construct ‘total’ theories (in the sense of achieving some complete determination of the psychological), but insofar as any particular interpretation will always be constrained to some extent by other interpretations, and by the overall requirements of integration and consistency. If holism is understood in this fashion, then it will not be seen as requiring that we attempt the impossible task of providing complete theories for speakers.

The fact that interpretation can never be directed towards the psychological as a whole suggests that interpretative practice is always a ‘local’ rather than ‘global’ enterprise. This is reflected in the actual practice of interpretation itself. Interpretation is never a matter of interpreting the whole of a speaker’s psychology. Nor is it ever concerned with taking account of all the available evidence. Instead, it is always focused on particular aspects of the speaker’s behavior, beliefs and so on. Interpretation is thus always directed at the understanding of this utterance or set of utterances; at making sense of these beliefs; at explicating this sequence of actions. Interpretation is, one might say, always a practical task oriented towards the particular, rather than a theoretical one oriented towards the universal. Such a practically oriented task does not require us literally to consider the whole body of behavioral and other evidence concerning the speaker, but only that which is relevant to the project at hand. Thus I may understand some sentences uttered by a native speaker of Greek, even though I cannot speak Greek with any fluency; I may know what you believe about the existence of God, even though I know nothing of your opinions on the financial competence of your accountant.

The conception of the ‘local’ character of interpretation enables us to deal fairly easily with Michael Dummett’s objection to Davidsonian holism, that such holism would make linguistic understanding impossible.

Dummett writes that: ‘when we try to take seriously the idea that the references of all names and predicates of the language are simultaneously determined together, it becomes plain that we are thereby attributing to a speaker a task that goes quite beyond human capacities’.¹¹ Without going into the detail of Dummett’s argument here we can see that, if holism did require the simultaneous determination of the whole range of variables concerning the speaker’s linguistic usage (and, more generally, concerning the speaker’s overall psychology), then linguistic understanding would not be possible. But, as we have just seen, this is not, in any case, what holism requires. Interpretation is an activity that proceeds within localized boundaries and with respect to often fairly narrow interests. The sorts of theories that can be constructed are always only partial’ or ‘localized’ theories. They are theories that describe only some portion of the psychological, rather than the psychological as a whole, and that typically operate within some particular framework or context. All interpretative theories are of this sort. And this is just what we should expect given the open-ended character of interpretation and given the impossibility of addressing one’s interpretative efforts to the psychological in its entirety.¹²

The idea that theories of interpretation have such a localized character does seem to have some precedent in Davidson’s own discussions of interpretation. In ‘A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs’ Davidson presents an account of interpretation according to which speaker and interpreter both employ occasion-specific theories that fall far short of providing complete theories for any language. Equally, in his discussions of irrationality, as we saw earlier, Davidson suggests that the psychological can be seen as partitioned into various ‘territories’, with conflicting beliefs separated from one another by the boundaries of those territories. Thus, not only might theories of interpretation be thought of as localized, but the psychological realm might itself be seen as made up of various localities.¹³

An idea very similar to that of the ‘localization’ of interpretation or of the psychological is, in fact, already present in linguistic pragmatics and in some areas of cognitive science. In pragmatics the idea appears in terms of the notion of a ‘frame’. Utterances are understood as always occurring within some particular set of beliefs. Those beliefs constitute the ‘frame’. They form a set of presuppositions that enable the utterance to be understood. In phenomenological and hermeneutic theory a similar idea is to be found in the concept of ‘horizon’.¹⁴ According to Husserl, what is presented in any intentional act is only an aspect of the object intended. Thus, when I perceive a table, I may see its near side and part of its top, but not its underside, nor that side which faces away from me. Moreover, my perception of the table’s shape, size, color and so on depends on how I view it. The various possible aspects with respect to which an object can be experienced are roughly what Husserl terms the horizon of the

object.¹⁵ The horizon is something like a set of possible experiences. Indeed, the notion embodies an idea of the connectivity and unity of experience. Thus any particular experience of an object, or any particular belief or attitude towards an object, connects with, and presupposes, many other experiences, beliefs and so on.¹⁶ Such ideas have a ready application to the structure of the interpretative project itself – as we shall see in more detail shortly. In fact the notion of horizontality has become an important one within much contemporary hermeneutic theory, largely, of course, through the influence of Gadamer and Heidegger, as well as of Husserl.¹⁷

The ‘horizontal’ or ‘localized’ character of the psychological means that the notion of the psychological realm as a whole must be the notion of a unity that is without determinate content. The psychological realm cannot be given any complete determination, but it does require a certain unity. It is this unity that is the requirement of holism. Any reference to the idea of the psychological in general is consequently to be understood as reference to a formal notion that serves to give notice of the overall need for the integration and consistency of attitudes, behavior and the rest. This way of understanding psychological unity also enables me to say a little more about its possibly propositional character. The psychological encompasses more than just the propositional, as we saw earlier, yet it is, of course, primarily in propositional terms that the unity of the psychological is expressed and articulated. Given the localized character of the psychological, such propositional articulation can now be seen as occurring within particular localities – it is a feature of particular projects, rather than a feature of the psychological as a whole. In its entirety, the psychological can never be understood on the model of a system of propositions.

4.2 The intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological

4.2.1 The idea of intentionality

The introduction of the idea of the horizontality of interpretation does, in fact, make possible a more detailed account of the dynamics of the interpretative process than has been provided so far, though it is an account that has already been implicit in much of what has gone before. The idea of horizontality sheds light, however, on more than just the structure of interpretation. Interpretative structure is dependent on the more fundamental structure of the psychological. The nature of the psychological determines the nature of interpretation, both in virtue of the fact that the psychological realm contains the objects of interpretative interest (beliefs, desires, actions and so on), and in virtue of the fact that interpretation is itself a part of the psychological. Consequently the notion of horizontality has application to the structure of the psychological in general, as well as to the interpretative process in particular.

In Husserl, the notion of horizontality is associated with the central notion of intentionality. In fact, as we shall see, both these notions (or something very similar – the idea of ‘frame’ for instance may well provide an alternative terminology to that of ‘horizon’) are required to some extent if any detailed account is to be given of the structure of the interpretative process. The two concepts of ‘intention’ and ‘horizon’ do not, however, appear as such in Davidson’s own account of interpretation. But one of them – the concept of horizon – was introduced in my own discussion in an earlier chapter: in the brief mention of Gadamer and his conception of interpretation as a ‘fusion of horizons’ (§3.4.4). What I shall suggest now is that interpretation and, more generally, the psychological, are characterized by what I shall call their ‘intentional-horizonal structure’, and that the thesis of psychological holism has to be understood in terms of this structure. By an ‘intentional-horizonal structure’ I mean a structure that consists in both a horizon or frame and an intention or focus. The concepts of intention and horizon will, of course, be immediately familiar to any reader of Husserlian phenomenology, and my own usage will not be greatly divergent from the term as it is employed within that context -though my use of these terms will tend towards a more Heideggerian, rather than purely Husserlian, account. I will, however, try to present these notions in a way that makes them accessible without any prior knowledge of their phenomenological origins.

Before going any further, it is perhaps worth noting that the idea of the intentionality of the psychological, or at least of the mental, does appear in Davidson’s writings as the primary feature by which he characterizes the mental realm. ‘We may call those verbs mental’, says Davidson, ‘that express propositional attitudes like believing, intending, desiring, hoping, knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering, and so on’,¹⁸ and he then treats intentionality as a semantic property of sentences that contain ‘at least one mental verb essentially’.¹⁹ Davidson offers nothing more than this semantic account of intentionality, and the notion figures in no significant or explicit fashion in his account of interpretation.²⁰ As I use it here, however, intentionality will be one of the basic structures of interpretation and of the psychological. Thus, while I agree with Davidson that intentionality is the characteristic feature of the mental or the psychological (as Brentano and Husserl claimed), my own use of the term will go somewhat further than Davidson’s. Indeed, as I use it here, the notion of intentionality has a much more explicitly phenomenological connotation. It will be used, not so much as a property of sentences (though it is that), as a structural feature of the psychological itself. While this use will diverge somewhat from Davidson’s own more purely semantic use, I do not believe that it will involve any commitments incompatible with the Davidsonian account.²¹

In Husserl, the intentionality of the psychological refers, first, to the fact that particular psychological attitudes are typically directed towards an object – beliefs, desires, fears and so on are *about* or of something (though this is not the case with all attitudes and feelings, it is so with respect to the vast majority).²² Even behavior may be said to possess a similar intentionality, a similar directedness, though it differs slightly in that an action is not ‘about’ what it intends, but rather is directed towards some object, insofar as it aims at realizing that object. Here the equivocal senses of ‘intention’ and ‘object’ both suggest the connection, but also obscure its explication. The connection between intention in action and intention in thought is, however, noted by Husserl.²³ The second sense of intentionality is related to the first, but concerns the psychological in general, rather than particular mental acts or attitudes. Thus the psychological is characterized as always being constituted around acts or attitudes that have a certain focus. To use an introspective example, there is always something with which my thoughts are occupied. So the psychological realm as a whole, and not merely particular psychological attitudes or acts, has a certain directedness or preoccupation. We are never aware of all our attitudes and behavior at once – instead our attention is taken up by particular experiences, problems, thoughts. This latter phenomenon may not be quite that to which the term ‘intentionality’ is usually taken to refer; it is nevertheless a related phenomenon and one that is surely best described in terms of intentionality.

The intentionality of the mental is a concept central to the work of Brentano and Husserl. And, while it might not be quite as central to my account of psychological holism, it still has an important role to play. This is because some concept of intentionality must be a crucial component in any holistic conception of the psychological, and because the concept of intentionality itself tends towards holism. To demonstrate the latter point – that intentionality feeds into the holism thesis – consider the case of belief once more. If beliefs are always of or about something, then the identification of such beliefs will, in part, require identification of the objects of belief. So I may suspect that you have a certain belief *p*, but that belief will only have been identified when I have identified what the belief is a belief about. The first step in identifying the content of belief is invariably a matter of identifying the object of belief. So I discover that your belief *p* is about the play Hamlet, and the belief in question is the belief that ‘Shakespeare was the author of Hamlet’. But the identification of the object of belief must entail other beliefs about the object and about other objects. In this case the original belief involves beliefs about the play, Hamlet, and, as such, it may also involve beliefs about its plot, its characters, its literary importance and so on. It will also involve other beliefs about William Shakespeare (and perhaps his Elizabethan context), about plot, character, theatre,

literature and so forth (here we can see how it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that there is some discrete task that is identical with 'identifying the belief that p'). One cannot avoid implicating other beliefs here, since to intend an object is, to some extent, to pick that object out from a background of other objects, and this can only be done, given that identifying beliefs involves identifying at least the object of belief, by charting out the relations between that object, in particular, and the rest. This point obtains, not only for belief, but also in more practical contexts. Thus particular tasks in which I am engaged cannot be identified without reference to that which the task is directed towards and thence to a network of attitudes, skills, practices and objects.

This is an especially important point, since there is a tendency to assume that the primary model for investigation of problems of meaning and understanding is a theoretical model – a model in which belief is paramount. But I have already pointed out how the holism that is at issue here is not merely a propositional or theoretical holism. Similarly intentionality need not be merely a feature of the theoretical. This point is crucial to Heidegger's critique of Husserl's notion of intentionality. It leads Heidegger to rephrase talk about the directedness of the psychological in terms of the way our experience of the world is primarily an experience of equipmentality, of a world of equipment ready-to-hand.²⁴ My own account must give a similar priority to the realm of our practical involvement, and to the non-propositional and non-theoretical character of the psychological realm in general. Here there is one further, though related point that bears mention, but that has been no more than suggested by my discussion up until now. It is the idea that interpretation is not something required only in respect of language; instead all our experience of the world, linguistic and non-linguistic, is interpretative. Again, this is a familiar Heideggerian notion. The act of using a hammer to drive home a nail takes the hammer as a tool for nail-driving and the nail as something to be driven (as well as something with which things can be fixed), and in so doing involves a 'seeing as'.²⁵ – an 'interpretation' of the hammer and of the nail. The point behind such an extended use of the notion of interpretation here is that it nicely expresses the way in which objects are taken up within our projects according to the particular intentions of those projects. It also allows us to see that the object is never completely taken up in any particular intentional act. Every such act takes up an aspect of the object: it 'reads' the object in a certain way while allowing that other 'readings' may also be possible.²⁶

The idea of the intentional character of the psychological tends towards some form of psychological holism. Equally, holism itself must be committed to some notion of intentionality. Without some such notion there is no way of allowing for particular beliefs to be picked out of the holistic network. And if this could not be done, then

there would be real problems in even making sense of the holism thesis. Indeed, given indeterminacy, it would be hard to know what to make of holism, since it would be difficult to know how to make sense of the idea of there being particular elements of the psychological – particular beliefs, attitudes or whatever. Intentionality seems, in any case, to be a basic feature of the psychological. It expresses the characteristic directedness of the psychological, as well as the impossibility of the entire psychological realm being presented simultaneously. The psychological is only presented in its particularity, and intentionality is the picking out of particular figures from the psychological ground. The phenomenon of intentionality (and the related notion of horizontality that I shall discuss in more detail shortly) thus provides us with a means of talking about the relation between particular components and the overall network of attitudes, behavior and so forth.

4.2.2 Intentionality and horizontality

The concept of intentionality also carries with it an idea of the horizontality of the psychological. This is evident in Husserl's development of the concept of intentionality. If intentionality is the picking out of a figure from a ground, then the horizon is properly the ground against which that figure is picked out. Intentionality and horizontality are thus closely connected. The intentional character of any psychological act implies that the act is always directed at an object. In part, it is the object that individuates the act. But, of course, the holism of the psychological realm means that the object of an intentional act will be individuated in terms of its relations with other elements within that realm. Thus the intending of some object presupposes a set of associated 'objects' with respect to which the intended object is individuated, namely, the set of objects that, in one sense, comprises the horizon of the particular intentional act. Of course, this talk of 'objects' is extremely vague and not altogether appropriate. For, given my emphasis earlier on the fact that holism encompasses more than just attitudes, so the horizon of an act is made up of a complex of beliefs, skills, expectations and so on.

Moreover, the actual constitution of the horizon will depend on the sort of act that is involved. Husserl typically uses visual analogies to illustrate the notions of intentionality and horizontality. Talk of 'horizon' does, of course, suggest an analogy with vision. And there is a very close analogy here. Vision is always focused – otherwise nothing can be seen but an indeterminate blur. The point of focus is located at the center of a visual field wherein the object is set amidst other objects. The location of the object is relative to those objects. Only within the

visual field is there any determinacy, and what bounds the visual field is the horizon. Such an analogy from vision suggests a similar structure to that which I have been setting out here. Yet it is also the case that acts of 'seeing' are themselves intentional acts, analyzable in the same fashion as other intentional acts. The object of a particular intentional act may well be an object seen – the table in my last example, for instance – in which case the horizon will involve various beliefs and expectations that the person looking at that table will have about its various aspects, its location in the room, its composition and so on, as well as certain presuppositions concerning the person involved – presuppositions concerning her position, abilities and so on. But, as I have already suggested, the intentional-horizonal structure also applies elsewhere, including cases where the horizon, as well as the object intended, will differ from the visual case. Thus one might take a particular action as an example of an intentional act – say the action of hammering a nail. And here the horizon involves the physical characteristics of hammer and nail, as well as the abilities and physical characteristics of the person who is hammering, in a much more obvious way than such abilities and characteristics are implicated in the visual example. The act of interpretation of an utterance can also be analyzed according to object and horizon: the object may be some particular utterance and the act will be structured towards achieving an understanding of that utterance. The horizon will include, amongst other things, various presuppositions about that speaker's psychology (including the interpreter's prior assumptions about the speaker's attitudes and so forth), and about the methodology of interpretation, while also involving certain capacities on the part of both speaker and interpreter. In all these cases the notion of the horizonality of the psychological can be seen as an expression of the holistic as well as the purely intentional structure of the psychological.

These latter two examples – the hammering of a nail and the understanding of an utterance – are of course much more pertinent to my considerations here than is the example from vision. Indeed, in some respects, I think that these latter examples are much better illustrations of the intentional-horizonal character of the psychological in general, since one is seldom involved merely in 'observing' – observation is typically related to other of our activities and concerns (even the contemplation of a work of art takes its place within a certain set of projects and itself constitutes a special sort of project). Thus the expectations and anticipations that are a part of an intentional act are not merely anticipations of possible aspects of the object – that, for instance, the other side of the table is much the same as this side – but anticipations and suppositions about the course of events, about one's own actions, about how some end will be best achieved. Most of these suppositions are, indeed, not even represented to oneself, but are merely embodied in one's mode of action.

An intentional act may thus be conceived as a project in which one is taken up by a particular concern – with achieving some end or resolving some difficulty. Such projects may be conceived of in varying degrees of particularity or generality. Thus we may take a project, with its associated object and horizon, to consist in the interpretation of a particular and specific utterance – Sam’s cry of ‘Gavagai!’ or perhaps ‘Hamlet!’ (is he jokingly referring to a small pig, have we neared a village, or has he just remembered the name of the play?) – or we may take the overall project to be that of providing a theory of interpretation for a language as a whole. Of course what we take the project to be in such a case depends on the nature of our own project as interpreters, and on the horizon within which that project itself is constituted. (Though note that the horizon of our own project is not itself a focus for interpretative concern – otherwise a regress would threaten.) There is, moreover, no way of setting out a determinate horizontal structure for all projects.²⁷ Not only do horizons differ from one project to another, but the horizon itself is also affected by the ever-present indeterminacy of the psychological.

Horizons are, by their nature as horizontal, necessarily indeterminate structures in which determinacy diminishes the further one moves from the centre of the horizontal field. This is nicely illustrated in the case of vision. We see most clearly what lies at the center of our field of vision and less clearly what lies close to the periphery – close to the horizon. In Husserl the horizon is, indeed, specifically described in terms of a horizon of indeterminacy²⁸ – he talks at one point of ‘the misty horizon that can never be completely outlined’ referring to it as ‘a dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality’.²⁹ Horizontality brings indeterminacy with it, but the more general indeterminacy of the psychological will always allow for interpreting the intentions, horizons and projects of the speaker in more than one way. And how that interpretation is to proceed is always constrained by our own intentions, horizons and projects wherein a similar indeterminacy also awaits.

Failure to recognize differences in the horizontal settings for different projects is often a cause of dissension and disagreement about how interpretation ought to proceed. Differences in horizon explains why the same text, utterance or problem may give rise to more than one solution, and why there may be no simple way of deciding between solutions. Disentangling the differing horizontal presuppositions is a difficult task; one that can itself lead to further disagreement unless the horizon within which that meta-level project operates is itself held more or less in common.

The horizons of our projects can differ, and they can and do change. Sometimes they change in ways that are not fully explicit. Recognition of the dynamic, ongoing character of interpretative activity allows me, however,

to say something more about the matter of first person authority that I discussed earlier. Such authority may now be seen to apply only in the actual making of an utterance by a speaker. For, as soon as an utterance has been made, it becomes something open to interpretation by the speaker, as well as by her listeners, as it is taken up within new projects, new horizons. This is surely the point of the comments from Davidson I quoted above: ‘an agent’s words have meaning in the public domain; what his words mean is up to the interpreter as well as to him. How he is to be understood is a problem for him as it is for others.’³⁰ First-person authority thus resides primarily in the act of speaking itself, and is otherwise constrained by the ever-present possibility of interpreting an utterance anew. In this respect the assumption of first-person authority is tied to the idea that utterances and beliefs are attributable to a speaker or believer. If the speaker does not know what he or she means, then this must undermine the sense in which what is said is properly said by the speaker. This is a problem that arises more explicitly in questions concerning the authorship of texts, and the problem of how to understand the authority that an author might be said to have over her work.³¹ The assumption of such authority, both in the case of authorship and speech, is, perhaps, related to the Kantian assumption of the formal unity of apperception in the Transcendental Deduction.³² Knowing what one means is a presupposition of the utterance being one’s own, that is itself a presupposition of the formal unity of the psychological.³³

4.2.3 The structure of the interpretative project

The intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological – which of course applies quite generally to all psychological acts – provides us with a way of conceiving of interpretation as proceeding, first, with some definite object and, second, within a particular horizon. Thus interpretation always focuses on a specific interpretative problem – ‘what does this word, this sentence mean?’ With respect to that problem certain beliefs, activities and so forth will be particularly relevant and so will constitute a localized ‘horizon’. Thus the interpretative project can be understood as always operating through the exploration of particular horizons -interpretation is itself localized in just this sense. This is so for the interpreter, and also for the one being interpreted. This horizonal-intentional structure is applicable to the whole range of possible projects:

it is applicable to the case of the field linguist trying to come to grips with a new and unfamiliar tongue; to the carpenter using wood and glue to make a chair; to the artist concerned to get the right play of color and of shape. But, to return to a familiar refrain: not only does this structure describe a certain methodological structure, it also

describes a real psychological structure. The intentional-horizonal structure is a characteristic feature of the psychological system itself. So where it is the psychological, or a portion of it, that is the object of interpretative inquiry, we find that the structure of interpretation is mirrored in the structure of that which we study. Thus the beliefs, utterances and so forth of any individual speaker will form localized, intentional-horizonal systems that are only parts of a much larger system.³⁴ The picture that develops is that, while the psychological realm does indeed form a unity, it is a unity encompassing many smaller unities – a network of networks. Within the overall network there will be many nodes that can, possibly, form the center for other networks.

It is, indeed, this conception of the psychological that was suggested in my earlier discussion of the localized character of interpretation. Interpretation always proceeds within some particular horizon, and with respect to some particular object. In this fashion interpretation is set up as working within some particular ‘area’ or locality. But, as I also pointed out before, the localized character of interpretation is nevertheless constrained by the overall requirement of integration and consistency. Consequently, the piecemeal appearance of the interpretative process should not obscure the fact that those localized horizonal structures have their place in a much larger structure which they do, in fact, presuppose – there is always a larger, though often not explicit, background.

At this point a difficulty appears to arise, however, in virtue of the fact that the interpretative background can never itself be made the object of interpretation. This is another point that I made earlier – a point that can now be rephrased in terms of the need for interpretation always to be located within some horizon. When the psychological realm as a whole is taken as the supposed object of interpretation, then there can be no horizon within which such interpretation could be located. Any theory that purported to provide an account of a speaker’s overall psychology would need to make explicit the entire set of intentional-horizonal structures that went to make up that speaker’s psychological network. But of course those horizons do not belong merely to the individual speaker, and the very attempt to interpret involves the articulation of a horizon shared by both interpreter and speaker. Thus the attempt to render completely perspicuous the psychology of another speaker presupposes that we can do the same for ourselves. But that requires that we should make explicit the horizon within which that interpretative project is itself located. In other words the horizons of interpretation must be made part of the object of interpretation. But in that case there really is no horizon with respect to which the interpretative project can be located. Yet some such horizon is essential. The moral to be drawn is that the idea that we should attempt to construct ‘total’ theories is

fundamentally incoherent – it presupposes that we can make the horizons of interpretation completely transparent even to ourselves. This we cannot do, but then, as we saw earlier, we do not need to do so.

Using the notion of horizon we can see that each interpretative project or each psychological ‘act’ presupposes a particular background that constitutes the horizon for that act or project, and yet it is never possible to provide a complete specification of that horizon. The horizon can, indeed, be understood as a very broad structure comprising a very general and all-encompassing background, or as a much narrower structure more immediately and directly related to the object of the particular project.³⁵

Here the limitations of the horizon metaphor perhaps become apparent. For, unlike the horizon of the visual field, the intentional horizon can be variously conceived as enclosing a very narrow field or a very broad one. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish elements of the horizon from elements of the object or objects within that horizon. The relation between the intentional object and the horizon is a little like the relation between the center of an onion and the layers that make up the onion. One can regard almost all the layers as layers and leave almost no center, or regard the center as very large and the layers few. To some extent this merely reflects the indeterminacy and incompleteness that we have already encountered as typical of the psychological and the interpretative realm. What we take as the horizon in any particular case depends on the horizon within which the interpretative project in which we are ourselves involved is located. Thus a sociologist engaged in observing interaction between strangers on a city street may treat the utterances of a passerby in a very different way, and place them within a different horizon or ‘frame’, than we would if we were simply hurrying home from work. What the indeterminacy thesis claims, of course, is that, in such a case, there is always more than one horizon within which the utterances can be placed. This point can be put using a familiar Davidsonian locution: there is always more than one description under which a particular event – for instance, the making of an utterance (to use one form of description) – may be understood. Here, of course, the underlying character of indeterminacy as a general thesis, namely, the ever-present availability of multiple description, comes to the fore.

4.2.4 Indeterminacy within horizons

The intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological can be taken as ruling out any complete description of either the psychological realm or of the world that is presupposed by interpretation. But it does provide a way of conceiving of the structure of the interpretative project itself. Moreover, it also provides a way of making some

sense of Davidson's claim that, on his account, indeterminacy will be considerably lessened. Davidson's own reasons for thinking this are less than convincing, but there is one way in which indeterminacy can be seen as mitigated or its effects reduced: the horizontality of interpretation may itself serve to do this. The horizon within which interpretation operates, and with respect to which the interpretative project is constituted, will place constraints on the number of acceptable theories. Thus, with respect to any particular interpretative project, constituted within a particular horizon, it is quite possible that indeterminacy may effectively be eliminated. But of course that is only so within that horizon. With respect to the overall psychological system there is no possibility of so eliminating indeterminacy, since there is no one way of dividing the psychological realm up into a determinate set of subsystems. What counts as part of the horizon can itself be subject to interpretation, and is thus itself revisable. As soon as our attention is transferred from the original object of interpretation to the horizon, then that horizon becomes questionable and a new horizon is set up. This suggests that the horizon itself is a very temporary and shifting entity. The horizons of interpretation are indeed continually shifting, as are the objects of interpretation, and the psychological in general possesses the same characteristic impermanence.

The effect of the horizontality of interpretation in reducing, or, for practical purposes, eliminating local indeterminacy provides support for a claim made by Hilary Putnam about the nature and extent of Quinean indeterminacy of translation. Putnam claims that indeterminacy is a consequence of the 'interest-relativity' of explanation.³⁶ Putnam illustrates the latter notion with a number of examples, but generally the idea of interest relativity is captured in the simple point that the adequacy of an explanation is dependent on (or relative to) the question to which it is an answer, and on the interests that lie behind that question. When applied to translation or interpretation this suggests that what theories are preferred will depend on how the translational project is viewed and on the interests that motivate that project. Different theories may well be favored according to the different interests and assumptions of the translator or interpreter. Explanatory, or translational, adequacy is thus dependent on the context of inquiry. Given this sort of relativity Putnam claims that 'the reason Quine's doctrine of the "indeterminacy of translation" ... appears so implausible is that we think of the doctrine from the point of view of *our* interests, explanation-spaces, etc. Given all of this, it is indeed unclear that there is any "indeterminacy". There may well be a (more-or-less) unique "correct" translation for us.³⁷ 'Interest-relativity', whether of explanation, translation or interpretation, is best understood as a reflection of the fundamental horizontality of the psychological. All explanation, all understanding, is horizon-bound. Consequently, indeterminacy does not arise as a major

problem with respect to the everyday practice of interpretation, because such interpretation always operates within particular horizons and with respect to certain aims and interests.

4.2.5 The dynamic of expectation and frustration

Earlier I suggested that one might conceive of an intentional act as constituting a 'project' Indeed, this notion seems to encapsulate both the intentional and horizational aspects of the psychological. The psychological realm is thus essentially 'projective' – it comprises various projects related temporally (as some projects succeed or precede others), genetically (as some projects give rise to others), and also 'logically' (as all projects are integrated within the overall unity of the person). Presupposed by this notion of 'project' is the idea that projects may be satisfied or frustrated. Indeed, it is characteristic of intentional acts in general that the anticipations and expectations they involve may sometimes be satisfied and sometimes not. This idea is given clear expression in Husserl where it is tied to the notion of temporality.³⁸ For my own purposes, the notion of the satisfaction or frustration of a project is a particularly important notion, since it provides the basis for an account of the dynamics of the psychological realm, and of interpretation in particular.

A project is constituted with respect to a certain object and within a particular horizon. The horizon, of course, can never be completely articulated because the horizon is not completely distinct from the many other possible horizons with which it is associated, and also because the horizon itself must always remain largely implicit with respect to the project that it partly constitutes – the horizon cannot be an object within that project. In its orientation towards some object the project sets up certain expectations and objectives. Sometimes these expectations turn out to be inappropriate with respect to that object – in the visual case, we may discover, for instance, that the imposing building before us is really just a street-front facade. But the objectives of a project may also be frustrated by the failure of certain expectations – if the building is just a facade then we will be unable to view the fine architectural details that we supposed to be at the rear of the building. Moreover, the failure of such expectations becomes more significant where the objectives of the project are closely tied to the confirmation or falsification of certain expectations. Thus our expectations may take the form of a theory that we hope will advance our understanding. This is, of course, directly relevant to the interpretative situation where we may aim to develop a theory that will enable us to interpret the behavior of some individual: any interpretative project is constituted in

such a way that the failure or success of the project depends directly on the confirmation or falsification of those tentative expectations that make up our interpretative theory.

The frustration of a project through the failure of certain expectations, or the failure of some theory, will inevitably lead to the modification of the project through the modification of the horizons within which it operates. An extreme example of a case involving such modification is where we encounter a set of marks on a page and, assuming them to be meaningful, attempt to translate or decode them. Finally, after consistent failure to make any sense of the marks (or perhaps because we come across evidence that suggests an alternative explanation of them – mice have upset a nearby inkbottle and the marks are merely their inky tracks on the paper), we modify our initial assumption that they are indeed meaningful. Such a process of modification is, indeed, essential, given the holistic character of the psychological, and the consequent requirement for integration and consistency. We modify our beliefs and assumptions in response to the discovery of an apparent breakdown in the integration between beliefs in order to preserve the overall consistency of beliefs. The modification of a project in the face of failure or frustration can thus be seen as part of a dynamic that arises naturally out of the holism of the psychological. Where such modification actually occurs it may be seen either as internal to the project or as involving the constitution of an entirely new project. How we take matters will depend on our own interpretative horizons. However, while the failure of a project invariably leads to some modification of that project, success will be unlikely to induce such modification. (Though the success of one project may affect other projects that are dependent on it or in conflict with it.) Indeed, it is perhaps characteristic of a project that its success will gain far less notice than will its failure. Thus we are seldom surprised to find that a side view of some building reveals a continuation of its street-front architecture (except in those cases where we expected the building to be merely a facade). And clearly the fact that success is often unnoticed unless it occurs in more dramatic or spectacular circumstances is because the failure of a project requires that something be done – the project must be abandoned and reconstituted, or at least modified – while success requires no such effort on our part.

The dynamic that is set up by the anticipatory structure of a project is thus one in which failure or frustration is primary. Failure brings into partial view the horizon within which the project operates, because such failure requires the modification of that horizon. The process involved here is, therefore, one in which projects typically encounter their objects in such a way that the initial expectations of the project are either fulfilled or frustrated. Frustration leads to modification, and modification may give rise to a new project, or a continuation of

the old in a new form; further frustration will lead to further modification until it may force the complete abandonment of the project. It may also lead to modification at some higher level of generality – the larger projects within which particular projects are located may be revised. Imagine the case of a carpenter in the process of making a chair. She has assembled the base and legs, and turns to work on the back. She discovers that the timber she had intended to use for the back of the chair has warped. She stops working and looks around for replacement timber. Unable to find any that is suitable, she has to rethink her plans. Maybe she decides to modify her original design; maybe she decides to turn the chair into a stool; maybe the design is neither amenable to modification, nor is the half-assembled chair really suitable for any other purpose, and so she is forced to abandon the project – at least for a time – and move on to something else. The same process may take place for the writer or the thinker. Consequently, an idea that initially seems to suggest a productive line of inquiry may, when we attempt to develop that idea, turn out to lead to an intellectual dead-end. We may then attempt to modify the original intuition in some way or to develop it along slightly different lines; failing this we may discard the original idea as simply unworkable.

It is in this process of frustration and modification that horizons give rise to other horizons and projects merge with other projects. It is also the process by means of which any particular project itself operates – projects are constituted in and by this very structure as our engagement with the objects of that project provokes certain responses and readjustments on our part that alters the way in which the object appears that provokes further response ...and so on. It is partly this aspect of the structure of our engagement with the world that Hubert Dreyfus focuses on in his analysis of those forms of activity that he calls ‘absorbed coping’.³⁹ The dynamic of projective activity, according to Dreyfus, is such that the agent acts in a way that is solicited by the environment, and in which the action is itself structured in terms of a certain tension within the field of activity, the resolution of which constitutes the accomplishment of the action – action is thus always a movement towards the reestablishment of a certain equilibrium in the agent’s relation to its environment.⁴⁰ Dreyfus takes this to demonstrate that such activity stands quite apart from the more deliberative and reflective action associated with propositional attitude psychology – with the structure of belief and desire – and so treats it as providing a counterexample to the Davidsonian approach in which such propositionality is central. As I see it, however, Dreyfus’ focus on the phenomenology of projective engagement does not run counter to the Davidsonian analysis I have advanced here, but is compatible with it and, indeed, can be seen to arise out of it, inasmuch as the structure Dreyfus describes is directly associated with, and might even be seen to be able to be derived from, the holistic character of the psychological that I have already

described. The fact that the phenomenology of projective engagement has the character Dreyfus identifies does not show that such engagement is independent of the prepositional attitudes, but only that the prepositional attitudes cannot be understood independently of the holistic and dynamic structure of which they are a part (as we saw in §3.4.1) – a structure that always centers on the agent in her active involvement with the environment in which she is located.

The process of encounter with an object, and the consequent failure or success of the project, is one that may be seen as possessing a dialogic structure involving the object and the expectations and objectives of the project. It is a process that has, in fact, been amply described in accounts of the nature of scientific thinking, as well as in more general discussions. The movement of the Hegelian dialectic can even be seen as expressing a comparable structure,⁴¹ and we have already noted similarities between the dialogic structure of radical interpretation and Rawlsian reflective equilibrium. Popper's account of the process of 'conjecture and refutation'⁴² is similar to the structure of expectation and frustration that is characteristic of the psychological realm. Indeed, Popper has characterized the scientific project in a way that closely mirrors the more general account I have been developing here. Thus in Objective Knowledge he presents the scientific project as guided by a 'horizon of expectations' that 'plays the part of a frame of reference: only their setting in this frame confers meaning or significance on our experiences, actions, and observations'.⁴³ Moreover, in describing the role of observation in science, he gives an account of the process of scientific inquiry that is very close to certain aspects of my own account of the structure of interpretation. As Popper writes:

Observations ... have a very peculiar function within this frame [the horizon of expectations]. They can, under certain circumstances, destroy even the frame itself, if they clash with certain of the expectations. In such a case they can have an effect upon our horizon of expectations like a bombshell. This bombshell may force us to reconstruct, or rebuild, our whole horizon of expectations; that is to say, we may have to correct our expectations and fit them together again into something like a consistent whole. We can say that in this way our horizon of expectations is raised to and reconstructed on a higher level, and that we reach in this way a new stage in the evolution of our experience; a stage in which those expectations which have not been hit by the bomb are somehow incorporated into the horizon, while those parts of the horizon which have suffered damage are repaired and rebuilt. This has to be done in such a manner that the damaging observations are no longer felt as disruptive, but are integrated with the rest of our expectations. If we succeed in this rebuilding, then we shall have created what is usually known as an explanation of those observed events [which created the disruption, or the problem].⁴⁴

The dynamic of expectation and frustration is one that is common to projects in general, whether they be projects aimed at the construction of a piece of furniture, the understanding of a neighbor's jokes, the interpretation of the exotic customs of an upwardly mobile New York financier or a New Guinean Highlander, the repair of a faulty light switch or the explanation of some anomaly in physical theory. In fact, the psychological realm as such can be seen as always organizing itself around particular projects with an intentional-horizonal structure. That organization is not static, however, for the character of projects as projects gives them an internal dynamic that leads to continual readjustment that is internal to those projects, as well as to disruption and reconstitution of those projects as a whole. In a sense, the same is also true both of the individual person and the community of which that person is a part. Individuals and communities are both characterized, in part, by the projects with which they are preoccupied, and thus by the horizons that govern their activities. Consequently both individuals and communities will possess a similar dynamic character – they are also subject to constant adjustment and response in the face of environmental circumstances.

4.2.6 Intentionality and 'immersion'

Individuals and communities are not only partly individuated by their projects, but they also tend to become immersed in those projects.⁴⁵ Such immersion arises out of the intentional-horizonal structure itself. Intentionality is a certain sort of directedness, but this does not mean that it is something brought about by some 'mental act' or that it is a function of decision on the part of speakers or agents. Instead, intentionality is a matter of the speaker or agent – the 'intending subject' – being already given over to the object such that the object is determinative of the subject's responses. Intentionality is thus not to be construed as a relation in which subject and object first stand opposed to one another, so that it becomes problematic how the subject can bridge the gap that separates it from its intentional object (there is no way such a gap could be bridged), but rather as a relation in which subject and object are bound together from the first. In this respect, of course, we may say that the character of immersion that is a feature of projects is not something additional to the intentionality of those projects, but is a facet of intentionality as such. Intentionality is the focus on a particular object to the exclusion of others; it amounts to a certain preoccupation with that object; a certain immersion in its sphere of its influence. Indeed, immersion and

intentionality can be viewed as two aspects of the same structure – immersion being the ‘phenomenal’ aspect of what appears ‘logically’ as intentionality.

Inasmuch as we never stand outside of some project, so we never stand outside of such ‘immersion’. We always find ourselves already given over to involvement within some horizon and in relation to some ‘object.’ In Heidegger’s Being and Time, this is expressed through the idea of our prior involvement in the ready-to-hand structure of practical activity – we are always oriented towards certain activities and such orientation is a matter of being situated in relation to a certain ordering of equipment. In hammering, we find the hammer to hand in a certain way, along with that to be hammered, and along with the workshop within which the hammering takes place. Since we always find ourselves within some such set of practical orientations, so we always find ourselves already given over to a particular object, a particular project, a particular horizon. In Gadamer’s work, the idea of immersion is taken up through the idea of ‘play’ (Spiel). Gadamer points to the way in which play – real play – is not something undertaken by the player, but an event in which the player is taken up by the play. Thus ‘all playing is’, says Gadamer: ‘a being-played’.⁴⁶ Gadamer takes the structure of play as indicative of the structure of understanding as such: in understanding we do not find ourselves in some neutral position in regard to that which is to be understood, but as already disposed toward it, and in being so disposed, as also caught up in a dialogic movement that is the ‘play’ of understanding – a dialogue of response and counter-response that involves us and the object, as well as other players. Understanding occurs in and through that ‘play’. As such, understanding is not a ‘subjective’ matter, but something that occurs between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and in a way that encompasses both.⁴⁷ Indeed, inasmuch as immersion is a feature of intentionality, and as immersion can be seen as prior to any separation of the one who seeks to understand from that to be understood, then so intentionality always involves, from the very first, both subject and object in necessary inter-relation. Here perhaps, is a partial phenomenological correlate to the interconnection expressed, in Davidsonian terms, in the idea of the necessary interconnection between the three varieties of knowledge.

The way in which our involvement in our projects entails an immersion in those projects is a crucial aspect of intentionality as such. But while such immersion is a necessary and inevitable feature of all understanding, and so of all and every project, and while such immersion is also tied to the appearing of the object as the focus for the project, it also brings with it an obscuring of the horizons with respect to which the project is constituted. Take the example of our carpenter once again. Her work presupposes the sharpness of her saw and chisels, the weight and

strength of her hammer, the bonding properties of glue. Yet seldom does she take note of these factors unless they are absent – when the chisel turns out to be blunt or the shaft of the hammer breaks. Similarly the linguist engaged in translating a hitherto unknown language may acquiesce in various assumptions, until those assumptions are brought to her notice by some breakdown in the translational project. Perhaps then she may even be brought to question the very activity in which she is engaged. It is the generally unnoticed horizontal setting – the background of assumption and expectation – that is brought into view when the project breaks down or encounters difficulty, and it is only then that the possibility arises of questioning aspects of that background.⁴⁸ Of course, because we do tend to become immersed in our projects, and so are inattentive to the horizon within which the project is constituted, so the baulking or breakdown of the project as a whole throws that horizon into especially sharp relief; because we are generally unaware of our background assumptions and expectations, the failure of those assumptions and expectations often has the ‘bombshell’-like effect described by Popper.

Mostly we remain unaware of the overall horizons of the project within which we are currently immersed, simply because the character of the project is itself such as to direct our attention towards the primary goal of the projects, and the objects concerned with that goal, rather than towards the background within which the project is constituted. This simply reflects, of course, the character of intentionality as such – that is, of intentionality as directedness towards, not the horizon, but the intentional object – and of immersion as just an expression or aspect of intentionality. This is not to say that one cannot ever make the horizon of some project into an object of attention, but that to do so will involve a change in the object and goal of the project – attention would have to be directed away from the original object towards a new object, the horizon itself – and consequently would involve a change in the project and in its constituting horizon. A new set of horizons would thereby be constituted to accord with the change in object and goal. In part, this indicates the difficulty in making the horizontal structure of a particular project explicit. It also indicates, once again, why it is that we generally lack awareness of the presuppositions on which our projects are founded. For we are inevitably preoccupied with the object of our projects (with the intention), and with the attainment of our objectives, rather than with the horizontal setting for such projective activity.

The tendency towards immersion in our projects not only gives rise to a certain blindness to the horizons within which such projects operate, but also to a tendency, particularly with respect to theoretical projects, for projects to be identified solely with their results – projects become ‘solidified’ or objectified within the world. So

scientific projects come to be identified with the theories to which they give rise; more practical projects are identified with the effects they produce or the artifacts that result. This tendency arises out of the intentional structure of projects themselves. Our immersion in a project is associated with our preoccupation with a certain object or end; it is associated with the intentionality of the project. Thus the project comes to be identified with that which is intended in the project, and the failure or success of the project is measured according to the failure or success in achieving that intended object. Similarly, individuals and communities may come to define and identify themselves in relation to those projects.⁴⁹

While this solidification of projects around the object or intention of the project is an almost inevitable occurrence, it can, nevertheless, lead to a misapprehension of the nature of our projects. It can easily lead us to treat projects as much less dynamic and more determinate than they really are. So a practical project such as fixing a shelf to a wall may come to be understood only in terms of whether or not a usable shelf results – yet the actual project involves more than just satisfying the need for a shelf (the need itself implicates much more within the horizon in which it is constituted) and takes place against a background that involves much more than just timber, wall and screws. Similarly, the scientist's work in developing a theory to explain some particular phenomenon is not grasped simply through an understanding of the theory that is the outcome of that work. It is very easy, however, to treat the project of the scientist as expressible solely in terms of its theoretical results, and consequently the purely theoretical component of the project may become abstracted from the practical interpretative context in which it is embedded. Scientific projects may then be seen as much more precise and calculative than they really are. In the case of both practical and theoretical projects the solidification of those projects may lead to a tendency to forget the continuity of even failed or superseded projects with the projects in which we are now engaged. In this fashion, a world of projects can easily become a world of objects; a world of active, dynamic involvement can become a world of detachment where we assess what has been done according to what it has left behind; a world of ongoing temporality, where past and future are continuous with the present, becomes a world imprisoned in the 'now'.

As the tendency towards solidification can lead to a mistaken conception of our projects, so too can talk of the failure or success of projects be misleading. Such success or failure must always be understood as related directly to the intentions within the particular project itself. Failure is the baulking of that project, the inability of the project to move forwards to grasp its objects; failure upsets the smooth progression from one project to other projects that may naturally flow from it. Success is the absence of such obstruction: we are able to move freely

forwards to other projects, or to carry the present project further. Whether a project has met with failure or success is thus not a simple or obvious matter to decide. It concerns the ease with which the project can continue. In one sense no project is a failure, for all projects contribute, in some way, to the ongoing life of the community and the individual. A project is a working out – an articulation – of possibilities, and this articulation takes place even when a project moves ahead with difficulty. It takes place even when the project may appear to fail.⁵⁰

The immersion in our projects that arises out of the intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological can perhaps be seen as one way of capturing the particular feeling of our being located in the world as ourselves. As Thomas Nagel puts it, ‘the fact that an organism has consciousness at all means, basically, that there is something that it is like to be that organism ... something it is like for the organism’.⁵¹ With respect to any particular project, we might say that there is an experience of involvement with that project – of being ‘taken up’ by it. The same goes for our involvement with our projects in general. Our involvement in the world has a particular character and operates within a particular human horizon. There is, indeed, a subjective quality to our being the sort of beings that we are, with the sorts of interests and possibilities we have. This subjective feature of experience is surely one reason why intentionality might be thought a problem for reductionist philosophies of mind. It is not merely the fact that mental states have an ‘aboutness’ to them, but that they also have a particular and subjective character which is the experience of being in a particular state or of being an organism in that state. And that character seems not to be able to be captured by any physicalist reduction.⁵²

What may be evident now, of course, is that this subjective feature of experience can be seen as arising out of the intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological. It can be understood as an aspect of the way in which horizons become effective for us, and draw us into the projects constituted within them, even while those horizons are themselves necessarily obscured. But this also gives us a way to better explain a feature of subjectivity that Nagel emphasises: that the experience of what it is like to be something seems not to be expressible in conceptual or propositional form. Nagel writes that: ‘I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task ... Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language.’⁵³ It is not entirely clear what Nagel is asking for here, since the limitation that seems to be at issue is not one that consists in our being unable to offer some description of the likely experience of bats (or of any other creature), but rather consists simply in the fact that any such description will

remain just that – a description. It will not amount to a re-presentation of the original experience in question nor will it count as any providing any final or complete description of that experience.

The problem is, in fact, more fundamental than Nagel seems to recognize here and certainly involves more than just an inability for humans to fully describe or to reconstruct the experiences of bats. In part, the problem is that the knowledge that is involved in knowing what it is like to be something is knowledge only in an unusual and special sense. Indeed it is not clear that there is any proper object that could be known here at all, since the ‘knowledge’ that is at issue is nothing more than the experience of involvement within a certain horizon. But that experience is only in an indirect sense an experience of the horizon, or of being within that horizon – strictly speaking it is an experience of whatever stands as the intentional object of the experience (and we can always give some propositional account of that). To put the point slightly differently: the experience of location within a horizon is part of (or arises out of) the intentional-horizonal structure within which experience or knowledge in the usual sense is possible, but such experience of location is always an experience of location with respect to some object or set of objects rather than merely of location in any more general sense and this should indicate that the ‘experience’ at issue here is, in fact, quite ambiguously described in terms of ‘an experience of location within a horizon.’ Thus, while the experience or knowledge to which Nagel attempts to direct attention certainly cannot be given propositional form, this is, to a large extent, simply because there is, strictly speaking, no such experience or knowledge at issue here to which any proposition could properly refer.

4.3 Dialogue, unity and world

4.3.1 The dialogue of interpretation

Projects possess a certain internal dynamic of anticipation and frustration or satisfaction. The dynamic structure that can be seen as characteristic of projects is, of course, also characteristic of the particular project of interpretation itself. At one level the dynamic structure is mirrored in that dialogue of interpretation that involves the interplay between persons, or between person and object (whether text, artifact or whatever). And certainly this is the most obvious level at which to describe the interpretative project as a dialogue. But, as the discussion should have already suggested, the interpretative dialogue – if that is indeed the right word – will be a more complex dialogue than just the interplay between speakers. Interpretation is an activity that goes on within the psychological realm as well as

with respect to it, and so interpretation is determined by the holistic character of the psychological, first, through the psychology of the interpreter and, second, through the psychology of the one interpreted – the individual speaker. The structure of interpretation is largely determined by the interplay between these two. Thus the development of a theory of interpretation is a matter of taking into account both the attitudes, behavior and so forth of the speaker, as well as those of the interpreter – for the attitudes of the interpreter are relevant in constituting the horizon within which interpretation proceeds. And as the horizon of a particular project may itself be subject to modification (for any horizon can be seen as standing within some larger horizontal structure), so the interpreter's attitudes and behavior may require modification, or actually be modified, in the course of interpreting some speaker.⁵⁴

The interplay between these two separate elements is one respect in which the dialogic character of interpretation is evident. However this dialogic structure shows itself on many different levels, and involves many different aspects of the interpretative project. In one respect, as I described it above, the dialogue can be viewed as internal to the interpreter, for interpreters must attempt to integrate their interpretation of speakers with their own psychology. Yet the dialogic character of interpretation is perhaps most clearly evident from the fact that interpretation involves the constant forming of hypotheses that are then tested against the speaker's behavior and modified accordingly. Interpretation is then, quite literally, a dialogue in which both speaker and interpreter attempt to communicate. But the dialogue does not end there, for it occurs also within the project of interpretation itself – it can be internal to that project. Thus different elements of the project may be played off against other elements, with the aim of achieving a satisfying interpretative theory. This is indeed, as we saw in chapter two, how Davidson presents radical interpretation itself as working: meaning and belief are played against each other until a balance is reached in the formulation of a theory that enables the interpreter to understand the speaker. More generally it is' of course, not just meaning and belief which are involved in this process, but the full range of psychological attributions. Indeed, many factors must be taken account of in the interpretation of a speaker.

The complexity of this interpretative dialogue is one of the central ideas that Gadamer intends to be captured through the idea of understanding as 'play,' and, in Gadamer's work, the 'playful' character of understanding is directly connected with the notion of dialogue, as well as with the concept of understanding as 'conversation' and as based around 'question and answer'.⁵⁵ Although he does not make use of such models and metaphors as does Gadamer, Davidson also gives explicit recognition to the complexity of the interpretative dialogue. He points, in particular, to the fact that no theory of interpretation can be adequate to all interpretative

encounters. The process of interpretation requires that we take into account a great many different factors. For this reason, Davidson distinguishes, in 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', between two different sorts of interpretative theory: a prior theory that is the theory speakers might hold prior to any particular interpretative encounter, and which may or may not be shared by speakers; and a passing theory that is the actual theory used to interpret, and that is geared to take account of the particularities of the specific encounter.⁵⁶ Davidson claims that no prior theory is adequate to interpreting a speaker, since no prior theory can provide us with the means to deal with the idiosyncrasies and novelty of a particular encounter – any prior theory must be modified for the particular occasion. Thus Davidson claims that it is not the sharing of a common language – the sharing of a priorly held generalized theory – that is the basis for interpretation (as David Lewis, for instance, would claim⁵⁷). Instead it is the ability to converge on passing theories – the ability to modify existing theories and to produce theories that take account of the particular occasion – that is primary.⁵⁸ Consequently, Davidson presents interpretation as a matter of playing off (and the resonance with Gadamer's own use of 'play' should not be lost on us here or elsewhere) our general theories of interpretation against the requirements of specific occasions and the evidence provided by the behavior of the actual speakers.

Yet this talk of 'theories of interpretation' is perhaps rather grandiose. The actual process of interpretation is one organized rather around particular projects than around theories. Indeed, talk of 'theories' may suggest that there is a greater determinacy involved in the interpretative process than there actually is. The theories that we use to interpret are embodied, if at all, as clusters of strategies, practices and capacities that are mobilized within particular interpretative projects. From such projects we may indeed extract some structure that we might call a 'theory', but such a theory is an abstraction from the actuality of the project. The real process of understanding goes on within the project itself. The notion of a 'language' is just such an abstraction.⁵⁹ In the case of interpretation we may thus come to identify the project with the production of a linguistic theory, when, in fact, such a theory cannot of itself provide any understanding of a speaker. Only in the actual practice of interpretation, within some interpretative project, do such 'theories' have life; and within that practice they take on a much more fluid and less determinate form.

The abstraction of the notion of a language from the heterogeneity of linguistic and other behavior is an example of an attempt to formalize what is essentially a dynamic, indeterminate structure. Such abstraction is akin to the solidification of our projects that results in the identification of a project with its results. It operates, not merely in the development of the abstract concept of a language, but also takes place in the form of attempts to reduce

projects to basic routines or codes of practice. Such abstract, theoretical accounts must always do violence to the reality of the project. They must do so, not merely because they attempt to formalize and to simplify, but also because they too are constituted as projects within a particular intentional-horizonal structure.

So interpretation is not just a simple dialogue involving speaker and interpreter; nor is it just a matter of applying some general theory to a speaker's words. It is a much more complex process than that – a process that in a sense comprises a number of dialogues: between speaker and interpreter; between elements of the interpretative theory; between the interpretative theory and other theories; between one's interpretation of the individual and one's interpretation of her surroundings. The complexity of the process is illustrative of the richness of the holism that is involved here. Of course the complex, open-ended character of interpretation reinforces the point made earlier that it can never be possible to achieve any final determination for the psychological as a whole. Interpretation is a process that can never come to an end since there are always new utterances, new items of behavior, new interlocutors, new environmental circumstances, new horizons that are relevant to our interpretative effort. It is the picture of interpretation as having this dynamic character that is clearest in Davidson's discussion in 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs'. The dynamic character of interpretation is, moreover, not accidental to it. The complex dynamic of the interpretative project is merely indicative of the essential dynamic of the psychological realm in general. I might say, at this point, that talk of the dynamic of the psychological may well be better captured by talk of its essentially temporal character. The dynamic of expectation and frustration, in which projective understanding consists, is a dynamic that can only be understood within a temporal frame. While I do not have the space to develop the idea here, one can nevertheless see that, as the psychological possesses an essentially dynamic structure, so too will it be essentially temporal – thus the intentional-horizonal structure is also essentially a temporal structure.⁶⁰

4.3.2 The ultimate horizon of interpretation

Interpretation is best understood as a dynamic, open-ended process of dialogue. It involves the individual as well as the wider communal and environmental background. But interpretation is typically organised around particular interpretative projects. In this respect it mirrors the more general structure of the psychological as such. The psychological is organised around particular projects that possess their own intentional-horizonal structures. The open-ended, dialogic character of interpretation, and of understanding in general, thus presupposes the possibility of

communication between horizons and of the interconnectedness of those horizons. Indeed, horizons, insofar as they operate as horizons, are essentially indeterminate structures. They are indeterminate, not merely because of the inevitable indeterminacy that is characteristic of the psychological, but, also, as we saw earlier, in virtue of their very nature as horizontal. Thus there can be no sharp divisions between different horizontal structures.

All of these considerations suggest that particular horizons cannot be understood as separate structures independent of one another. Instead, particular horizons always implicate other horizons and can always be embedded within wider horizontal structures. The recognition of such interconnectedness between horizons is reinforced by consideration of the rational structure of the psychological in general. The rational constraints that apply to beliefs, and to attitudes and behavior in general, can be applied, not merely within horizons, but, at least potentially, across horizons also. Thus the unity of the psychological is a unity that encompasses all horizontal structures. This same point is reflected in the idea that the individual cannot be construed as separate from the wider social and environmental setting in which she is located (an idea discussed in §3.4.4). Holism extends, in a sense, to encompass all possible speakers and their social and environmental settings. While any particular interpretative project is constituted within a particular horizon that is the horizon operative for the interpreter (as charity counsels, we assume speakers to utter mostly truths, and so we assume overall agreement between their beliefs and ours), the overall horizon for our interpretative activities is not a horizon that is exclusively our own, but one that belongs to other speakers also. That overall horizon can only be the horizon of the world as such. But in that case the world – the world-horizon – is not just my world, or even our world, but a world we hold in common with all speakers.

The conception of the psychological as horizontally structured and yet rationally constituted, even though the psychological is also indeterminate, implies that the psychological realm must be understood as being constituted as a rational, indeterminate unity. The unity of the psychological is itself reflected in the idea of an objective world that is a presupposition of the possibility of interpretation and of understanding. The dialogue of interpretation depends on there being only one such world, even though that world can be approached and encountered through a variety of different projects and within a variety of different horizons. In fact, the unity of the objective world mirrors the unity of the psychological itself – the unity of the world can never be exhausted within any single horizon even though different horizons can always be located within that worldly unity. Thus the world itself seems to have the character of a horizontal structure – it is that within which particular projects and horizons

appear, within which dialogic encounter is possible – and yet, since it presents itself as the ultimate horizon, so it will always remain beyond the range of any of our projects.

Every project, then, no matter how broad its compass, will be constituted within the overall horizon of the world itself. Such a concept of the world as horizon appears in the work of the later Husserl. As Husserl writes: ‘every worldly datum is a datum within the how of a horizon . . . in horizons, further horizons are implied, and . . . anything at all that is given in a worldly manner brings the world-horizon with it and becomes an object of world consciousness in this way alone’.⁶¹ Any horizon is, in part, a structure of possibilities. The world-horizon, as Husserl himself suggests, is that overall structure of possibility that consists in the presupposition of the unity of all possible horizons. Such unity is not a determinate unity, and can never be made determinate (there is no wider horizon within which that could be achieved), but is rather the unity that consists in the ever-present possibility of shifting from one horizon to another, of horizons expanding or contracting, of the sort of ‘fusion’ of horizons mentioned by Gadamer. The world-horizon embodies the presupposition that all horizons, no matter how different, are nevertheless situated within the overall horizon of the one and only world. Even the presupposition of the community of speakers – itself a horizontal notion having a similar ‘formal’ character – stands within the broader horizon of the world.

As the world-horizon represents the absolute horizon for all our activities, so it presents itself as an almost entirely empty, formal structure. There is no horizon within which the world-horizon could be located, and, consequently, no way in which it could be made the object of investigation. It stands behind all investigation, all interpretation, as the fundamental presupposition of investigation itself. The notion of the world is therefore not a notion that has any content – there is no ultimate description of the world, in this sense, that can be given. The world, it might be said, is ‘no thing’ at all, since to be some ‘thing’ is already to be constituted within a horizon. So what typically pass as descriptions of the world are not descriptions of the world as such, but only descriptions of particular objectifications of the world within particular projects – ‘the world’ as viewed ‘under a description’. Perhaps, more properly, they are only objectifications of particular projective horizons – of the frames within which particular projects are constituted – that are then identified with the world itself. Yet no account can be adequate to the world as such, because no matter how wide the horizon it will never be so wide that it can encompass the world-horizon itself.

It is, of course, in the sense of ‘the world under a description’ that we can and do talk about the world’ in a more specific sense than that of the world-horizon. The world of the Newtonian physicist is, in this respect, different

from the world of the romantic poet just insofar as both constitute different projects and operate within different horizons – they represent different objectifications of the world.⁶² Recognition of this point enables us to make good sense of Thomas Kuhn’s famous claim that different scientists live in different worlds – they do so insofar as they are situated within different local horizons, insofar as they are engaged in different projects. The notion of ‘the world’ is thus ambiguous between the local worlds correlated with particular, local horizons or projects, and the world-horizon that is the global horizon for all our projects.⁶³

The same ambiguity found in the notion of ‘world’ can also be seen to apply to the concept of ‘community’. In one sense this notion refers to the global community of speakers. In this sense the concept can never be given concrete determination for it represents nothing more than the pure and ever-present possibility of communication. In another sense it refers to particular, local communities – particular communicative, co-operative groupings. Unlike the global community, such communities can be viewed as concrete, determinable structures. They can be viewed as constituted within particular horizons of their own, but, insofar as they may be the subject of sociological, historical, political, linguistic or anthropological study, they can also be considered as constituted within the horizons of particular activities. In this latter respect such local communities can also be seen as abstractions from the larger psychological whole in much the same way as the worlds of the physicist and the poet are also abstractions from a larger whole.⁶⁴

Yet although the world-horizon is a pure, almost content-less notion, this should not be taken to indicate its irrelevance. The world-horizon is not, to use the Wittgensteinian phrase favored by Richard Rorty, ‘a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it’.⁶⁵ What moves with the turning of this particular conceptual wheel is the entire machinery of interpretation, of understanding and of the psychological. Without the world – the one world expressed in the idea of the world horizon – there can be no possibility of moving outside of the narrow confines of our own mental lives. But if we cannot do that, there can be no mental life for us to move out of. As Davidson himself reminds us, quoting Shakespeare’s Ulysses:

...no man is the lord of anything,
Though in him and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others;
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught

Till he behold them formed in th 'applause Where they're extended.⁶⁶

The world-horizon is, indeed, the objective correlate of the holism that characterizes the psychological; it also represents the ultimate framework within which all speakers and the objects they encounter are to be located. The world-horizon is the ground for the ever-present possibility of dialogue between speakers (a possibility more particularly captured in the notion of the global community of speakers), and of interaction between speakers and the animate and inanimate things that surround them.⁶⁷ Since the principle of charity expresses the presupposition of the overall agreement between speaker and interpreter and the overall truth of beliefs, so charity itself can be viewed as an expression of the presupposed horizon of the world.⁶⁸ Within that horizon lies the possibility of integration between the many different horizons of individual projects and speakers.

One way of understanding the world-horizon – the way that often seems to be presupposed by the Davidsonian conception of charity in particular – is that it represents the framework of causal relations in which speakers are enmeshed. It thereby embodies the presupposition that speakers can interact causally with one another as well as with other objects in the world. As it involves the notion of causality, so it may also involve the notion of spatio-temporal connectedness. Certainly space and time can themselves be represented as horizons of our experience, or as aspects of the horizons according to which experience is organized.⁶⁹ The world-horizon is not, however, simply a causal or spatio-temporal framework. The ideas of causality and spatio-temporality have to be seen against the background of a more fundamental notion of unity that is the essence of the idea of the world-horizon. For the world-horizon is the ground for all of the possible relations between speakers, and between speakers and objects. Those relations are not exhausted by relations of causality or spatio-temporality.

It will, of course, be pointed out that the presupposition of a common world does not establish the actuality of that world. My argument so far may have established that a common world must be presupposed, but this does not imply that a common world exists – or so one might argue. Later, when I discuss the problem of skepticism, this point will arise as an objection to the anti-skeptical implications I will be drawing from holism – implications Davidson also draws. It will also be an element in the discussion of verificationism (see §6.3.4). But to pre-empt any possible misunderstanding on this score it will be as well to make my position clear here and now. One way of putting that position would be to say that the distinction between the world as presupposition and the world as actuality cannot be maintained in this context – there is, indeed, no horizon within which such a distinction could be

established. So one could say that the presupposition of a common world entails the presupposition that the world as presupposed is the world as actual; that presupposition being a presupposition of all discourse, including philosophical discourse.

The only uneasiness I have about this way of putting things concerns the notion of the world as actual. For part of what is involved in the suggestion that the world, as horizontal presupposition, might be different from the world, as actual or existent, seems to rest on an assimilation of the world to the objects within the world. The implicit assumption is thus that the world exists or is actual in much the same way as the objects within it. Yet the world is not an object, and this is so whether the world is conceived as horizon or as the totality of what is. The world conceived as horizon is not an object, but that wherein objects appear as actual. The actuality of the world-horizon must therefore be different from the actuality of objects. It is only ignorance of this difference that allows us even to raise the possibility of the non-existence of a common world. Since the world horizon is that wherein all our questioning and doubting is possible, it cannot itself be questioned or doubted. We cannot talk about ourselves, about our beliefs, about our behavior, without also talking about the world. All are entwined together. There is, moreover, no more general concept of the world to be untangled from all of this other than the notion of the world-horizon, and that notion is the notion of something that is, in a sense, almost empty of content. It is the notion of the pure horizon within which all our beliefs and behavior, as well as the objects with which we interact, are located and within which they are interconnected.

On this holistic model the world cannot be construed as something that stands over against the individual subject. In part, this is because the concept of the subject, as usually understood, disappears – is ‘deconstructed’ – with the development of broad psychological holism. This is not to say that we cannot distinguish between the subject as individual person and the world or community, but rather that there is no clear separation to be made between person, community and world. Thus the person is no longer to be conceived of as a separate entity – a subject that stands over against another set of entities – the objects – that makes up the world. The notion of the individual subject has instead been replaced by the notion of a psychological unity in which the world and the community are already implicated. The world is itself understood as the correlate of such unity, as well as the background against which more particular, ‘localized’ psychological unities are located, rather than as a separate realm of ‘objects’. The relation between the world and the individual is thus not a relation that can be viewed on any

'representationalist' model. If it can be spoken of in relational terms, then it is a relation of implication that encompasses the individual, the community and the world – that implicates subjective, intersubjective and objective.

5. Charity and understanding

The previous two chapters set out the basic features of psychological holism. The psychological is constituted as a system of interdependent elements – beliefs, desires, etc. – that are themselves constituted in terms of their interconnections. The holism of the psychological gives rise to an indeterminacy such that there are always multiple readings of the psychological that are equally acceptable. Such indeterminacy is mitigated, however, by the fact that the psychological is nevertheless organized around particular localized structures – particular projects – that are constituted within a particular horizon, and with respect to a particular intentional object. Such projects may be as complex as the project of writing this book or as simple as the tapping of my computer keyboard to produce the word ‘cat’. The structure of the psychological is mirrored, not unexpectedly, by the structure of interpretation itself: interpretation is holistically structured, as well as being indeterminate. The unity of the psychological realm is expressed, in part, in the idea of rationality that itself functions as a constraint on our interpretative projects. That unity is also expressed in the holistic presuppositions of a community of speakers (or persons) and of a common world. These presuppositions are further explored in this chapter through the discussion of the principle of charity – a principle in which the idea of rationality is also implicated.

5.1 The nature and role of charity

5.1.1 Charity as an expression of holism

The holism of the psychological realm determines the structure of the interpretative project. Interpretation is a process by which the various elements of the psychological are articulated as part of an overall theory for the speaker. Yet holism not only requires that interpretation itself be a holistic process, it also gives rise to an initial problem. It is a problem that I have already discussed the problem of how one can even begin interpretation without already having some access to the psychological system that is the object of interpretation. As Davidson presents it, the problem is that in order to interpret utterances we need to have some knowledge of beliefs, but in order to identify beliefs we must have some idea of how to interpret

utterances. This, of course, is the point at which Davidson introduces the principle of charity: assume that the speaker's beliefs are generally in agreement with our own. This provides a principle by means of which we can go on to assign meanings to the speaker's utterances. Our provisional identifications of beliefs may then be subject to amendment in the light of that assignment of meaning ... and so on.

I have already made some comments about how charity ought to be understood – I described it earlier as the methodological expression of the presupposition of both a common world and a community of speakers. That is, it is a way of expressing in methodological terms: first, the idea that speakers are located within a shared world; second, that the psychological realm is not a realm of individual speakers each of whom represents a self-sufficient unity, but that it extends instead to encompass the set of all speakers. The latter implies that the constraints of holism – the requirements of coherence and integration – apply over the community of speakers in general. Charity is thus the methodological expression of psychological unity, and so of rationality. Of course, as we saw in the last chapter, the unity of the psychological is a horizontal unity. Consequently charity is itself a horizontal notion. It embodies the idea that interpretation, in common with any other project in which we might engage, always takes place against a wider background: ultimately against the background of the world and the community.

When charity is expressed in these terms, particularly as an expression of the presupposition of a community of speakers, it becomes apparent that the initial interpretative problem set by the holistic nature of the psychological – the problem of gaining access to the closed circle of attitude, behavior and the rest – does, in part, embody a misunderstanding of the interpretative position itself. For, given that holism is such that it encompasses the community of speakers, there should, in general, be no problem of gaining access to the psychological system of another. One already has access to that 'system' in virtue of one's own status as an interpreter, a speaker, a person. Just as one cannot abstract other speakers from the community of speakers, so one cannot abstract oneself either. Thus one already participates in a common, though indeterminate, realm of belief, attitude and behavior prior to any explicit attempt at interpretation. All interpretation already takes place within the common horizon of the psychological. The introduction of charity as a solution to the initial problem of gaining access to the 'circle' of meaning and belief is, consequently, somewhat misleading. Charity is not the solution to *this* problem, because there is no

problem to solve. The appearance of a problem is merely a product of our inadequate understanding of the holism of the psychological.

The notion of the all-embracing community of speakers does not, however, provide us with any specific attributions of attitudes for speakers. It remains as a purely formal principle of unity analogous to the related idea of the world-horizon. The notion of community sets up an overall horizon for the interpretative project, but it does not completely determine the horizons or the results of any specific interpretative project. Indeed the horizon of the community cannot even be made a proper subject of interpretative inquiry. So, while there is no general problem about our access to the psychological unity of the community as a whole (since it is a unity in which we already participate), there is a problem about how we are to gain access to particular horizontal systems on the inside of that unity. It is with the articulation of such local systems that interpretation is always concerned, for, as I said earlier, interpretation always proceeds within a particular local horizon, that is, with respect to particular objectives and problems – and in interpreting a speaker one is also concerned with the articulation of the horizons within which that speaker's attitudes and behavior are to be located. Yet, while such local structures are indeed constrained by the overall unity of the community of speakers, there is no way of deducing, from the purely formal unity of the community, the particular beliefs, attitudes and so on of individual speakers. It is at this point that charity does turn out to have a role much like that described by Davidson. Charity provides us with an initial specification of the beliefs, desires and other attitudes that are relevant to the local horizon within which a speaker may be taken as operating. It thereby establishes a horizontal framework for the particular interpretative project. Consequently, the problem to which charity is a solution is not the problem of access to the psychological realm in general, but the problem of access to particular localities within that realm.

Charity enables the setting up of the immediate or local horizon within which any particular interpretative project proceeds. Within that horizon it also provides an initial theory of belief for the specific interpretative encounter – a theory that is modified in the course of that encounter. Charity also provides a constraint on interpretation, since the maintenance of the horizon requires the maintenance of an appropriate degree of coherence within the horizon. Charity is thus, primarily, a methodological principle that has only specific or local application – it always operates with respect to particular interpretative projects. Certainly charity applies in all interpretative projects, and so its application is a general feature of

interpretation, but the overall agreement and truthfulness that it prescribes is directed primarily to particular localized horizons and cannot be specified completely or uniquely (owing to the indeterminacy and incompleteness of the psychological that affects the local horizon itself), or in advance of any specific interpretative project or encounter. Charity is, of course, a principle of unity that is an expression of a much wider and indeterminate unity – a unity expressed in one way in terms of rationality or coherence, and in another in terms of community or world. But, as it is applied in the actual project of interpretation, it operates only to set up the horizon within which particular interpretative endeavors take place, insisting on the maintenance of the internal coherence of that horizon, and establishing an initial theoretical starting point.

Of course, the physical circumstance of any interpretative encounter – the physical background of objects and events against which it takes place – itself determines a large part of the local horizon for that encounter, that is, it determines a large part of the horizon within which interpretation can proceed, and with respect to which the speaker must be understood. Indeed, interpretation often proceeds by relating the speaker's behavior to her physical surroundings – by inferring the meanings of the speaker's utterances and the nature of her attitudes, not only from the rest of her behavior and attitudes, but from the objects and events in her environment. In such basic cases, the strategy of interpretation is to match utterances of the speaker with utterances that we ourselves understand, the latter being utterances that truly describe some aspect (or aspects) of the speaker's environment. Such a strategy follows from charity itself, in its insistence on the presupposition of agreement.

In any particular interpretative situation charity thus prescribes that we should take the speaker to have attitudes, particularly beliefs, about much the same objects and events that we ourselves do. Those objects and events provide the clues to the speaker's attitudes. Moreover, in prescribing that the physical surroundings are the same for speaker and interpreter, charity also requires that we should take the speaker to have mostly true beliefs about those surroundings. Such an assumption of overall truth does, of course, follow from the assumption of agreement in attitudes. For what we believe is also what we hold to be true, and thus, where there is agreement in beliefs, there is also agreement in what is held to be true. But the assumption of overall truth is important for another reason also – a reason that I discussed earlier – too much error or falsity in the system of belief undermines the possibility of identifying beliefs. Indeed, the

supposition that a speaker has beliefs about the same objects and events as we do will be rendered increasingly implausible as the speaker's beliefs are shown to be increasingly in error (assuming that they are so shown). So the overall truth of a speaker's attitudes must always be preserved. In this respect, charity can be seen as a principle requiring the maintenance of the rationality of the speaker, precisely because it requires the maintenance of the coherence of the speaker's psychology.

The simplest way to view charity is as a principle that sets up the initial horizon with respect to which particular interpretative projects proceed; a horizon that includes the physical environment (and so includes, especially, assumptions about beliefs) as well as assumptions about skills, desires, likely intentions, patterns of behavior and so on. Yet that initial horizon, as well as the theory of belief that is initially assumed, will necessarily be subject to modification as interpretation actually goes ahead. Such modification will be constrained by the overall requirements of consistency and integration that flow from holism, that is, by constraints of rationality that can themselves be expressed in terms of the principle of charity. In some cases, of course, the interpreter may find that it is necessary to attribute to the speaker false beliefs. Indeed, this may be the only way of making good sense of the speaker – perhaps the speaker is so mistaken that the falsity of belief will threaten the integration of beliefs within the particular, localized horizon with respect to which interpretation has so far proceeded. In such a case, the interpreter will be forced to broaden the horizons of interpretation in order to maintain the overall truth of beliefs and the overall integration of the local system. Thus the original prescriptions of charity are always open to revision, both in the sense that the initial theory of beliefs and attitudes will, inevitably, be revised, and in the sense that the horizon within which interpretation proceeds may itself be modified and broadened.

There are, however, some complications that need to be added to this picture. Interpretation is structured, as are all projects, within a horizon, and with respect to some point of focus or intention. What counts as the focus depends on the level at which the project is itself described. Typically, we might say, that interpretation, of the sort at issue here, is concerned with understanding a body of behavior – both linguistic and non-linguistic – and with understanding the broader psychological structure in which such behavior can be embedded. Charity can be viewed as setting up the horizons of the project conceived in this more general form. In the process of developing and applying a theory of interpretation, however, the focus is typically on particular items or narrow groupings of behavior, and the associated groupings of

psychological structures. At this more particular level, charity can be viewed as setting up a correspondingly narrower set of background assumptions, and so forth, that are part of a correspondingly narrower horizon (here the establishment of the initial theory of belief or of attitudes is particularly important). This is really no more than a reflection of the point I made earlier: how we take charity to operate and what level of agreement we take it to prescribe depends very much on the way in which we identify the particular interpretative project – on how that project is described.

Since charity may operate on different levels and with varying degrees of specificity, so, even in the same interpretative project, charitable assumptions may be operating on a number of levels. One way of putting this point is to say that there is always more than one way of describing any interpretative project or of describing the horizons within which it is constituted. This reflects something of the indeterminacy that attaches to charity, as much as to any other element of the psychological. It also suggests the extent to which the operation of charity may often go unnoticed. Indeed, our own immersion in the interpretative task – the way in which we are taken up in the particularities of that task (see 4.2.6) -means that our charitable assumptions are usually not even recognized by us. Moreover, if charity is an expression of psychological unity and horizontality, then charity will indeed be a necessary presupposition of interpretation, and yet, as it is always present, it may easily be overlooked or taken for granted. This is all the more likely, given the indeterminacy of charity and the varying levels at which it may apply. Of course, sometimes charity may be explicitly appealed to by an interpreter. Such appeal will always be at the level of specific interpretative engagement, at the level at which we are confronted with particular items or groupings of behavior or whatever, and so will involve an appeal to a limited set of shared attitudes and so forth. But such explicit appeal to charity is almost certainly the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, for the most part, we make such assumptions without recognizing them as such; so we place speakers within certain horizontal frames without even noticing that we are doing so.

At this point we need to recognize that charity, as I have described it, is not a principle from which we can expect a great deal in the way of advice as to how to go about the actual task of interpretation. We already do that well enough without any such detailed advice; indeed, we do it largely through implicit reliance on the principle itself. Later in this chapter, I will have more to say on this. But certainly we should note that charity is not a principle to which great appeal can be made when we encounter interpretative

difficulty. In some extreme cases charity may be helpful, but in most cases appeals to charity will only result in the initial problems of interpretation resurfacing as we disagree about what counts as optimal agreement or about what counts as an acceptable interpretation in the circumstances. Charity does not offer a solution to interpretative difficulty, but is more like a presupposition of any interpretative endeavor. In this respect the principle can be viewed, perhaps somewhat superficially, as the codification of a simple principle of commonsense, rather than a finely honed piece of methodological technique. In such a vein, charity could be viewed as an expression of the principle that without some rough background of agreement there is little hope of two people understanding one another. The point of the principle as developed here, however, is to show how such a ‘commonsense’ principle is indeed underwritten by something subtler and more complex, and how it is more strongly grounded in the nature of interpretation and of the psychological itself. Thus, whether or not it is to be treated as a feature of commonsense charity is a structural feature of interpretation, and of interpretative methodology, rather than a principle that is an explicit part of our interpretative theories.

5.1.2 An alternative reading of charity?

The reading of charity that I have advanced here is, of course, one that takes us some distance from the original Davidsonian version of the principle. It is also a somewhat different account from that offered by Ramberg in his discussion of Davidsonian charity. While Ramberg emphasizes that charity is ‘an indispensable methodological principle’,¹ he characterizes charity rather differently from the way I have here. In particular, Ramberg is unhappy with the usual way of treating charity in terms of the assumption of agreement. To treat charity this way is, according to Ramberg, to treat it as having a role to play only with respect to the evaluation of competing theories of interpretation; such a conception of charity gives the principle no part to play in theory construction itself. Ramberg apparently takes this view because he conceives of the assumption of agreement in terms of the matching up of the beliefs of the interpreter with those of the speaker. And in the initial stages of interpretation there are no beliefs for interpreters to match their beliefs with. This can only be done when we have theories to compare – that is, when we have formulated a theory of belief according to which we can attribute beliefs to the speaker. Since Ramberg sees charity as operating precisely at the level of theory construction and not as a principle of theory choice,

the idea that charity can be treated in terms of the assumption of agreement is, from Ramberg's point of view, mistaken.

Of course, that charity might operate as a principle of theory construction need not prevent it from operating as a principle of theory choice as well. And there is nothing in Ramberg's account that precludes charity from operating to constrain the way in which theories are developed or as a principle that might be used in adjudicating between theories. Ramberg's point can, nevertheless, be taken as restating a point I myself have made: that charity is a methodological presupposition of interpretation rather than a principle that will assist in resolving particular cases of interpretative difficulty. This is so for reasons I have already mentioned: because charity is the methodological expression of the overall unity of the psychological, and of the community and world; and because charity can offer no precise interpretative prescriptions. The latter reason arises from the fact that charity operates primarily to set up an initial horizon within which interpretation can begin – a horizon that will always be subject to modification – and because of the indeterminacy that affects the horizon itself such that there is no single correct way of setting up the horizons for any interpretative project.

While Ramberg's emphasis on charity as a principle of theory construction is largely correct and does indeed serve to rectify a common misreading of the principle, the way he puts this point is somewhat misleading. For it suggests that charity only enters in at the very early stages of interpretation, before we have established any theories about a speaker's beliefs. Yet in fact charity operates in all interpretative activity as quite a general principle. It certainly operates to set an initial theory of belief and of attitude, that is then subject to modification in the light of the interpretation of specific items of behavior. This is its clearest application. But just as the basic presuppositions of rationality, community and world are always present in interpretation, so charity, as the methodological expression of such 'horizontal' notions, is also always present. It is present as a constraint that seeks to minimize irrationality, and as a presupposition that enables anomalous utterances, beliefs or whatever to be placed within a wider and more familiar horizon – there will always be some wider horizon of agreement being assumed no matter how much particular horizons may be modified.²

Ramberg also claims that charity ought to be carefully distinguished from principles embodying anthropological or psychological assumptions – principles that may be employed as pragmatic constraints

on interpretation.³ Such constraints may provide useful shortcuts in interpretative practice, but are not essential to interpretation. The only constraints that are needed are those provided by the formal Tarskian constraints (the constraints that follow from adoption of the Tarskian truth theory as the model for a theory of meaning), and by the role of charity itself as a precondition in the actual construction of theories of interpretation. So long as Ramberg is taken as denying the need for any constraints over and above those embodied in the Tarskian constraints and in the presupposition of charity, then he is certainly correct in denying the need for any additional constraints here. However, as Ramberg himself suggests, the fact that no additional constraints are needed does not imply that we should expect to deliver an acceptable theory of interpretation at one go, nor does it imply that inadequate theories can always be identified and rejected at the very beginning. Insofar as interpretation is a holistic process, so it is also a dynamic process. Thus the Tarskian constraints, and those that follow more directly from holism, operate effectively only in the ongoing activity of interpretation.

The structure of interpretation is such that we are continually attempting to make best overall sense of the evidence available, in the light of the theories we deploy. On the Davidsonian account, Tarski provides the basic model for our attempts at theory construction, while charity provides the preconditions. Within this framework, it is a matter of adjusting theoretical and evidential considerations until we reach an acceptable equilibrium. If we seem to be forced to interpret an utterance as expressing an odd or anomalous belief, then this marks a point of tension between our theory of meaning and our theory of belief that may be resolved as our interpretative efforts proceed further or that may lead us to revise the theories themselves (or to reconsider our assessment of the evidence).⁴ This description of the interpretative process does not require any additional constraints – pragmatic or otherwise – and charity itself should not be construed as a principle that embodies any special anthropological or psychological assumptions beyond its role as the methodological counterpart of the thesis of psychological holism. If it sometimes seems that additional constraints are needed, this partly reflects the simple fact that the principle of holism, which is the underlying constraint on interpretation,⁵ will allow of being expressed in various forms. Some of these different forms of expression may give rise to the impression that there are actually a variety of constraints at work here, when, in fact, the only constraints are those embodied in Tarski and in the presupposition of charity.

5.2 Charity, error and reference

5.2.1 Charity and the problem of error

Once we understand charity in the light of the horizontal or local character of interpretative practice in particular, and of the psychological in general, then we can clearly see that the employment of charity will not rule out the possibility of interpreting speakers as having false beliefs or beliefs that are in conflict with our own. One of the common criticisms of the Davidsonian use of the principle of charity, however, has been precisely that it does not allow for error on the part of the speaker. This criticism is made by a number of writers,⁶ and is often accompanied by a claim to the effect that charity should be rejected in favor of some other principle of rationality or Richard Grandy's principle of humanity.⁷

Grandy's principle recommends that we should 'prefer the interpretation that makes the utterance explainable'.⁸ Originally he presented it as a principle specifically designed to meet some supposed defects in the principle of charity as it appears in Quine. Grandy sketches the example of Paul, recently arrived at a party, who asserts that 'The man with the martini is a philosopher', while before him stands a man drinking water from a martini glass.⁹ In fact there is a man at the party who is a philosopher and who is drinking a martini – the only martini-drinker at the party – but he is out of sight in the garden. Grandy suggests that the charitable interpretation of Paul's utterance is to take it as an utterance about the martini-drinking philosopher in the garden, since that way Paul is interpreted as having a true belief. But, in the absence of any reason to suppose that Paul knows about the philosopher in the garden, the better interpretation is likely to be one which takes the utterance – or at least the belief it expresses – to be about the water-drinking man with the martini glass, even though it results in the attribution of a false belief to Paul. It is this latter interpretation that Grandy sees as the one preferred by the principle of humanity.

Graham Macdonald develops Grandy's argument into a criticism, not only of the Quinean principle, but of the principle of charity as it appears in Davidson also. Thus he writes that the principle of charity 'is scarcely persuasive' since 'in advocating maximisation of agreement in interpretation ... [it] counsels neglect of considerations as to whether the speakers are likely to have attained knowledge of the

truths on which they are construed as agreeing'.¹⁰ In place of charity Macdonald recommends Grandy's principle of humanity, which Macdonald claims is clearly 'a refinement of the principle of charity'.¹¹

It is, however, questionable whether Grandyan humanity really does add anything to Davidsonian charity. Admittedly, there are problems with some of the formulations of charity that Davidson has employed – talk of maximization of agreement in beliefs or of true beliefs, for instance, fails to take account of the fact that there is no maximal number of beliefs that a speaker can be said to have. As Davidson comments 'there is probably no useful way to count beliefs, and so no clear meaning to the idea that most of a person's beliefs are true'.¹² In this respect Davidson suggests that it is more appropriate to talk about optimization of truth or agreement as the aim. Much of the criticism of Davidsonian charity, however, seems simply misdirected. Certainly Davidson himself has never presented charity as the inflexible principle that so many others seem to have taken it to be. Thus, in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' Davidson writes that 'We get a first approximation to a finished theory by assigning to sentences of a speaker conditions of truth that actually obtain (in our own opinion) just when the speaker holds those sentences true. The guiding policy is to do this as far as possible, subject to considerations of simplicity, hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course, our commonsense, or scientific knowledge of explicable error.'¹³ Indeed, the nature of charity as it follows from the holism of the psychological is such that the principle can never offer detailed or complete advice on the ascription of attitudes. The principle is, by its very nature, characterized by indeterminacy and incompleteness. The problem with charity is not its inflexibility, but quite the opposite: it sometimes seems too flexible and too tolerant of differing interpretations – but in this respect it merely reflects the character of psychological unity itself.

The same indeterminacy that affects charity must, however, also affect any principle such as Grandy's principle of humanity. Thus humanity will be unlikely to offer any more precise interpretative advice than will charity. Indeed, in some respects the difference between charity and humanity might be seen to reduce largely to a difference in emphasis. Charity directs our attention to the background of agreement that makes interpretation possible; humanity directs attention to the need to minimize unintelligible disagreement. Both principles are ambiguous and both are indeterminate. In practice the interpretative prescriptions they generate (and those prescriptions will always be fairly general) will be

much the same – as they must be insofar as both principles will depend on much the same holistic considerations. In this respect it may seem that there is little reason to prefer one formulation of the principle to the other.

Bjørn Ramberg argues specifically for rejecting the Grandyan principle (and others like it) because he sees it as a pragmatic constraint on interpretation that is simply not needed. The original role of charity as a precondition of interpretation (insofar as it presupposes the connection between sentences and the speaker's environment) is sufficient, in combination with the constraints derived from Tarski, to ensure that unintelligibility is minimized. In Ramberg's view any move towards a principle such as Grandy's will only contribute to an obfuscation of charity's real role as a precondition of interpretation. To some extent Ramberg is surely correct in rejecting principles such as Grandy's. Grandy does not seem to allow for the fundamental role which charity plays, and therefore his recommendation of humanity seems to depend on a misreading of charity, and a misunderstanding of the nature of interpretation itself. But it also seems true that Ramberg's rejection depends on the mistaken assumption that charity has a role limited to setting up an initial theory of belief. In fact, as we have seen, charity not only serves to set up the initial horizons of interpretation, but it also operates at a variety of levels of interpretative activity. There is always some presupposition of agreement further in the background.

The real problem with the Grandyan principle derives from a point I made earlier when I suggested that humanity and charity might be seen as differing largely in terms of emphasis. Grandy's principle obscures the proper role of charity in that it directs attention away from the background of agreement, and consequently away from the holistic structure of the psychological that underlies the interpretative project. Thus the claim that charity does not allow for error on the part of speakers, and that it ought to be rejected in favor of Grandy's principle of humanity, depends on a misunderstanding of the nature of charity due to a failure to understand the holism out of which it arises. Charity need not blind us to the possibility of error – neither our own nor that of those we interpret -and it need not preclude us from taking account of difference or error in belief right from the start. In trying to interpret a speaker we need to take account of as much of the relevant evidence as possible. Sometimes this will lead us to suppose as part of our initial hypothesis that many of a speaker's beliefs are false. Moreover, even where we initially

assume that a speaker has got things right, we can always come to revise this view according to the progress of our interpretative efforts and the accumulation of new evidence.

It will, in fact, always be possible that the specific assumptions that we make on the basis of charity – assumptions that are part of the interpretative horizon – will be refuted. The presumptions involved in charity can thus always be locally defeated. By this I do not simply mean that we may sometimes attribute the wrong beliefs to speakers – that is always a possibility, and our initial attributions of belief and of attitude will inevitably require modification. Instead I mean that the more general horizons of our interpretative project – that will include an often unarticulated background of assumed true and agreed upon beliefs, but will also include skills, abilities, desires and so forth – may also turn out to be mistaken in particular cases. Perhaps we have assumed that our speaker distinguishes rabbits from other small animals, but realize that this may not be so when the speaker cries ‘Gavagai !’ at the first sight of our pet piglet. Such an event would certainly lead us to revise some of the background assumptions that were part of the horizon of our project, though the revisions may not be major ones. More radical modification of the horizon will usually only arise when we encounter intractable difficulties within the project constituted by that horizon. Thus the repeated failure of our attempts to make sense of a particular utterance or set of utterances may lead us to modify the background assumptions, or some other aspect of the horizon within which we have been operating, in a more radical fashion. That such horizontal assumptions should be defeasible is indeed implied by the structure of interpretation – deriving from the structure of projects in general – as involving a continual dialogue of anticipation and modification. In this respect charity can be seen as itself involved in the dialogue of interpretation, providing a background of assumed agreement that is progressively articulated and re-articulated in the ongoing project of interpretation.

We can always be wrong in our assumptions about just what a speaker holds true or about other aspects of the speaker’s psychology. This is one way in which charity can be seen as locally defeasible. There is another sense in which charity is also locally defeasible: it may fail with respect to some particular interpretative encounter as one might turn out to be mistaken about the status of some particular creature as being a speaker – perhaps the individual we have been trying to converse with for the past half-hour turns out to be just a highly sophisticated vending machine. What is not defeasible, however, is the global presupposition of the community of speakers and the common world that they share – the presupposition

in which any particular application of the principle of charity is ultimately founded. To be a speaker is indeed to be a participant in the community of speakers and to share in the common world within which communication is possible. While localized failure of the assumption of overall agreement and truth may occur in particular cases, one cannot be mistaken in thinking that, if some creature is a speaker, then it is also a participant in the community of speakers and an inhabitant of the same world as ourselves. The very possibility of encounter between speakers presupposes a common world within which such a meeting can occur. Indeed, any sort of encounter presupposes that what is encountered should appear within the horizon of the world itself – the world is indeed the absolute horizon for any possible encounter whatsoever. The community, and the common world in which that community is located, represent the global horizons that constrain and encompass the psychological realm in general. They are the indefeasible ontological presuppositions that are given methodological expression in the particular and defeasible assumptions generated by charity.

Truth and agreement is, I have said, prior to error and disagreement. Some philosophers and social theorists have considered such priority objectionable, however, insofar as they take it to imply, or to be associated with, the view that there is some explanatory priority of true over false beliefs.¹⁴ Yet such priority is not at all implied here. Any particular belief, whether true or false, can require explanation depending on the circumstances. Whether a belief requires explanation depends on the degree to which it seems to fit with the rest of the psychology of the individual who holds that belief, and not on whether the belief is true or false. This does, indeed, reflect a point I noted earlier in discussing the nature of rationality: in both cases it is coherence, or the lack of it, between a belief and other beliefs that is the significant factor. Of course, if an individual accepts a belief as true, then that belief will likely exhibit a fair degree of coherence with the rest of that individual's belief. But that it is coherent in that way may not be at all obvious. This is not to deny that there is not some priority given to the notion of truth on a holistic, Davidsonian account. For there is an important priority of truth over falsity here – though it is not a priority of explanation. In fact, it is a priority already indicated: truth and coherence go together in a way in which coherence and falsity do not. Too much falsity among beliefs undermines the possibility of identifying beliefs at all. Moreover it is only against a background of true beliefs that false belief can be understood as such. Thus, insofar as truth is generally, we might say, 'coherence-preserving', so there must

be a priority given to true over false belief. Our interpretative endeavors are thus grounded in the possibility of true belief and utterance.

5.2.2 Charity and theories of reference

The sorts of cases that may force the interpreter to revise her initial interpretation of a speaker, or that may require some expansion of the horizons of the interpretative project – cases where the speaker can only be interpreted as having a large number of false beliefs or beliefs in disagreement with our own – may sometimes be used as evidence in favor of the supposed ‘autonomy’ of reference with respect to truth. Indeed it is used in just this way by Colin McGinn. Reference is said to be autonomous according to McGinn insofar as it is possible for a speaker to refer to an object independently of the truth or falsity of the speaker’s beliefs about that object.¹⁵ Such autonomy is seen by McGinn, however, as running counter to the assumption of overall truth in beliefs required by the principle of charity. Indeed, we have already seen, in chapter three, how some philosophers regard the referential relation as largely independent of the holistic character of the psychological, and so view it as providing the basis for a more reductive approach to meaning and the psychological. The claim that reference is autonomous with respect to truth is thus another version of the same claim, a claim here raised by McGinn specifically with respect to charity.

McGinn illustrates the alleged autonomy of reference with an example. He cites the case of our ascription to some of the ancients the belief that the stars are really holes in an immense heavenly dome that allow light from a fire beyond to shine through onto the earth. McGinn points out that we make this ascription assuming that the belief at issue is indeed about the stars and that the belief is false. Here we do not take the falsity of belief to undermine either our ability to interpret the object of belief or the ability of the ancients to refer to the stars. McGinn takes this example as demonstrating that reference is indeed autonomous with respect to truth. Generalizing from this, he claims that the charitable assumption of agreement cannot be necessary for interpretation.

The sort of autonomy of reference that McGinn claims to have illustrated only appears, however, where we focus on some particular range of relevant beliefs or where we construe the horizon of belief in very narrow terms. With respect to that narrow set of background beliefs, reference may indeed be autonomous. Thus I may have certain erroneous beliefs about the nature of the stars – perhaps I believe

them to be pinhole imperfections in an enormous upturned cereal bowl that is the sky – and yet it is still the stars about which I have these false beliefs. In this case reference does display autonomy with respect to those particular false beliefs that I hold. This limited autonomy of reference is not denied by a holistic approach. What holism does rule out is any more general autonomy. Thus, while my being able to refer to the stars in this case may indeed be independent of the particular false beliefs that I have about them, this does not mean that such ability to refer is independent of all my beliefs, nor does it show that the ability to refer is independent of any more general falsity of belief.

Reference is autonomous in this case with respect only to a limited set of my beliefs. Put more accurately, it obtains only with respect to a fragment of the horizon within which the belief in question is located. Thus I am able to refer to the stars, even though I have a number of false beliefs about the stars, because the horizon within which those false beliefs is located includes many more beliefs that are true, and involves a range of practices that mesh with those true beliefs. Thus there may be many other true beliefs that I can be taken to hold about where to look for stars, how to identify them, about stars as points of light and so on, as well as a whole set of linguistic assumptions about the meanings of the words I use in talking about the stars. Where a speaker is interpreted as having any false beliefs, then the possibility of reference always depends on a broader horizon within which the overall truth of beliefs is in some sense preserved, and within which even false beliefs can be integrated into a background of attitudes, abilities and so forth. McGinn's example is thus an example of only limited error in belief – if that were not so we would have serious difficulty in even making sense of the example. (As we earlier had difficulty in deciding what beliefs to attribute to the unfortunate Smith or to Stephen Stich's Mrs T.) Consequently, this example merely illustrates once again the holistic character of the psychological – reinforcing the point that reference is not independent of the overall network of attitudes, abilities and behavior that make up the psychological unity of a person.

McGinn has, however, a further claim to make against the holistic Davidsonian position. He claims that the denial of the autonomy of reference, which he views as implicit in the principle of charity, suggests that charity has much in common with so-called descriptive theories of reference. Such theories have, in recent times, come in for a good deal of criticism, and a number of philosophers have argued for their inadequacy as accounts of the nature of reference.¹⁶ The possible association of the Davidsonian

position with such theories could thus be suggestive of problems within the Davidsonian approach itself. This is certainly McGinn's suggestion – a suggestion echoed by Michael Devitt¹⁷ and Kim Sterelny.¹⁸

Descriptive theories of reference suggest that we should assign reference to proper names, and to some other terms, according to what is more or less a version of charity: we should attempt to maximize the truth of descriptive statements about the bearers of such names or about the objects they designate. Thus N. L. Wilson's original formulation of charity is part of an answer to the question 'How should we set about discovering the significance which a person attaches to a given name?'¹⁹ Wilson replies: 'We select as designatum that individual which will make the largest possible number ... of statements true.'²⁰ Opposed to such descriptive accounts are causal theories of reference of the sort advanced by Kripke and others. According to causal theories the reference of a term is determined by the causal connections that obtain between that term and objects in the world. Terms are held to 'rigidly designate' objects irrespective of the beliefs that a speaker may hold or come to hold about that object. It is such a causal theory that forms the basis for the approach to semantics espoused by Fodor (and also by Devitt) that I discussed in chapter three (§3.2.3). Such accounts are claimed to be preferable because of just the sorts of considerations that McGinn adduces against Davidson: because they allow the autonomy of reference with respect to truth. We are not thereby committed to denying reference to names just because the statements in which those names figure are false.

There does seem to be a prima facie case for saying that Davidsonian holism is indeed opposed to causal theories of reference. This seems to be confirmed by Davidson himself. In discussing the point that communication is based on convergence in the causes of belief he writes: 'It is clear that the causal theory of meaning has little in common with the causal theories of reference of Kripke and Putnam. Those theories look to causal connections between names and objects of which speakers may well be ignorant. The chance of systematic error is thus increased. My causal theory does the opposite by connecting the cause of a belief with its object.'²¹ In fact, as was suggested by my discussion of McGinn's original example, holism, and the associated principle of charity, need not be incompatible with the adoption of some causal referential theory – a theory with strictly limited application. What will be ruled out, however, will be the adoption of such a theory as providing an adequate account of reference in general.

Causal theories can only operate to provide a limited account of reference as it obtains within an existing horizon. One reason for this is suggested in the quotation from Davidson immediately above: causal theories of reference increase the possibility of error in beliefs, and they do so precisely because, as we saw earlier, they allow too great an autonomy of reference with respect to truth. Some 'autonomy' of reference is acceptable, but, as I suggested in my discussion of McGinn above, any such autonomy is strictly limited, and can obtain only within a particular horizon and with respect to a part of that horizon. Any more generalized autonomy would only undermine the very holistic connections by which beliefs, along with attitudes, are themselves individuated and identified. To attempt to deploy a causal theory as a theory of reference for terms in general would be to allow the possibility that error could infect almost all, or some very large proportion, of our beliefs. But this would be to allow the possibility of such a radical breakdown in psychological integration that the very identity of the beliefs that were supposedly in error would be compromised; the idea of widespread error might then itself be cast in doubt. Causal theories are thus not ruled out by holism, instead their scope is shown to be severely limited.

The idea that causal theories of reference can have only limited application is a point that Richard Rorty also makes. He claims that what the Davidsonian approach achieves is in fact a 'marriage' of Kripkean and Strawsonian insights. Thus he writes that:

Davidson weds the Kripkean claim that causation must have something to do with reference to the Strawsonian claim that you figure out what someone is talking about by figuring out what object most of his beliefs are true of. The wedding is accomplished by saying that Strawson is right if construed holistically – if one prefaces his claim with Aristotle's phrase 'on the whole and for the most part'. You cannot, however, use Strawson's criterion for individual cases and be sure of being right.²²

Rorty's account of things here seems pretty much on the mark. Descriptive theories do seem to embody many of the intuitions that are part of the general thesis of psychological holism. But this does not mean that in particular cases reference might not display the sort of limited autonomy with respect to truth that McGinn's example appears to illustrate. In such cases some version of a causal theory may well be appropriate. Thus, while Davidson's position does seem to contain elements also found in descriptive theories of reference, this association need not be construed as damaging to the Davidsonian position.

Indeed, many of the intuitions that lie behind causal theories of reference can be accommodated within the holistic, Davidsonian model.

Of course, theories of reference are not, in any case, an important focus of concern for Davidson. This is because he regards reference as a notion that is secondary to truth, and that cannot be central to our understanding of meaning. That Davidson regards reference in this fashion is a consequence of his rejection of any possibility of construing the referential relation in terms which make that relation independent of the wider holism of the psychological, and of his view that it is at the level of sentences, and not at the level of terms (which is the level at which reference operates), that meaning arises and that theories of meaning are to be tested. These are issues I discussed at greater length, along with Davidson's rejection of referential theories of meaning in general, in the elaboration of psychological holism in chapter three (§3.2.3). Whether the problem is approached in terms of holism as such, or in terms of the principle of charity, the conclusion is much the same: reference cannot be the central concept in the understanding of meaning, and is subordinate to the notion of truth.

The priority of truth over reference is in fact encapsulated, as we saw earlier, in Davidson's employment of Tarski, whereby truth and meaning are related within a theoretical structure in which the notion of reference (or satisfaction) is part of the technical machinery by which a definition of truth (a theory of meaning) for a language can be mapped out. So we do not need a theory of reference in addition to a theory of truth. All we need is a theory of truth that will serve as a theory of interpretation.²³ Reference is secondary to truth and, except in certain limited cases, is dependent on it.²⁴ Indeed the dependence of reference on truth reflects the more general point that, for Davidson, there can be no clear distinction between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic such that a special relation – reference – is needed to get from one to the other. Davidson's rejection of such a distinction is something that I will discuss more fully in Part III.

5.3 The presupposition of agreement

5.3.1 The nature of agreement

Charity, as I have presented it, is primarily a methodological principle: it operates to constrain interpretation, and to set up the particular horizon within which interpretation proceeds. In its simplest form

it sets up the initial horizon, and an initial theory of belief, that are then subject to modification as interpretation proceeds. The application of charity is itself a necessary presupposition of interpretation. It is a methodological presupposition founded in the more general presupposition of rational unity, and of shared community and common world. Charity, which is expressed in terms of the presupposition of particular, local horizons (including particular beliefs), needs to be distinguished from these more general and fundamental presuppositions. Yet it is easy for the presupposition of charity to be treated as identical with the presupposition of a common community and world-horizon. Certainly Davidson, for instance, often talks of charity in a way that encompasses both these aspects.²⁵ Generally, however, I have taken charity as a methodological principle founded on, rather than identical with, the presuppositions of community and world. This is because it is important to be able to distinguish between the defeasible, methodological assumptions generated by charity – assumptions that are part of particular interpretative horizons and that may turn out to require modification or abandonment – and the indefeasible global assumptions of rationality, of community and of world that lie behind charity in its particular applications.

Of course the notions of community and world that are, on my account, so closely related to charity are themselves pure, almost empty, notions of unity and integration. It is possible neither to provide a complete account of the world nor of the psychological unity that is the community of speakers, just as it is not possible to provide a clear and complete account of rationality. Consequently, the presuppositions on which interpretation is based do not include any assumption of a determinate common structure or common nature in which speaker and interpreter share. There is no set of rational procedures to which all speakers must adhere; there is no single, precise criterion of personhood; similarly the principle of charity is not founded in the assumption of some common nature, even though it may generate theories of interpretation that posit some such common nature or specific shared attitudes. Moreover, as we have already seen, the agreement charity prescribes – the particular horizons it sets up – will inevitably differ as the project of interpretation itself differs.

It seems, nevertheless, to be quite commonly held that if agreement is necessary for interpretation, the requisite agreement must be agreement in terms of some determinate set of common rational principles; a single, specifiable and mutually acknowledged world; or, most often, some determinate, shared human nature. Thus Roger Trigg writes that:

The enormous variation between human societies in different times and places poses an immense problem for anyone wishing to understand their members. One of ... [my]... major themes ... will be the necessity of giving the notion of our common humanity some content if we are to assume the possibility of understanding those beyond our own culture ... Once we reject the assumption that other humans, in our culture or beyond it, are basically like us, hermeneutics becomes a necessary, and at the same time impossible discipline. Without the assumption of a common nature, any kind of understanding of those we regard as our 'fellow men' becomes impossible.²⁶

The principle of charity is seen in just this sort of light by many writers. Thus Graham Macdonald says of charity that 'it rests on a belief in the unity of human nature: a belief that people in different cultures are essentially similar'.²⁷ Moreover the principle of humanity, as set forth by Grandy, itself seems to be embedded in a conception of interpretation that takes interpretation to be largely based on a similarity in attitudes, and to proceed through the interpreter's 'simulation' of the attitudinal system of the speaker.²⁸

Davidson himself emphasizes, as I have here, the connection between agreement and understanding. Yet the agreement that is essential for interpretation on a Davidsonian account cannot be agreement with respect to any single set of specific beliefs, but is ultimately the presuppositional, almost formal, agreement embodied in the notions of rationality, community and world. It is an agreement that consists, not in specific beliefs or attitudes, so much as in the articulation that goes on within a process of continuing dialogue and communication; it is an agreement that has its substance in ongoing dialogue, rather than in the results of any such dialogue, or in the similarities that might exist prior to such a dialogue.²⁹

So far as specific beliefs go there is almost no single belief that cannot be dispensed with in the interpretative/communicative process. Certainly some shared logical principles are indispensable – a principle of consistency or non-contradiction seems central³⁰ – but this need not imply any explicit, shared belief in those principles (the principles may operate independently of whether we affirm them or not), nor does it imply that those principles must be interpreted and applied in any particular fashion. Understanding is undoubtedly facilitated where there is a sharing of relevant attitudes, language or practices prior to the interpretative encounter (the manifest difference between trying to understand someone who speaks your own language and trying to understand someone who speaks a tongue that is foreign to you is a good case

in point) but no such prior sharing of particular attitudes, language or practice is essential to interpretation or communication. This is, indeed, one of the points implicit in Davidson's rejection of accounts of meaning that are based on notions of linguistic convention. The possibility of understanding is not predicated on agreement with respect to any specific, priorly held, beliefs, theories or procedures.

Nevertheless, particularly in discussing the nature of triangulation, Davidson has himself talked in a way that might be taken to suggest that makes triangulation, and so also understanding, possible are certain commonalities between ourselves and those we interpret – commonalities that consist in certain similarities between the response we make, and the responses of other creatures around us, inasmuch as we each find the same things in the world to be themselves similar. Thus Davidson writes that: 'Thought and language are features and functions of rationality...But interpretation requires more similarity than this: we could only understand another creature that was tuned to some of the main features of the world we are tuned to.'³¹ This seems obviously true, but the fact that it is does not mean that the grounding of understanding in some 'common nature' is correct after all. If we cannot correlate our behavior with the features of the world that correlate with the behavior of some other creature, then that other creature will not be able to be understood by us. For the most part, of course, evolutionary history means that we will share, with many other creatures around us, and certainly with creatures of our own species, similar capacities that enable us to identify and track similar features of the world. But we need not rely only on our evolutionary heritage in this regard. We can augment and extend our capacities to identify and track. The fact that we do not currently share certain capacities with another creature does not, then, rule out interpretation or understanding, but it does mean there is an additional challenge to be overcome – indeed, we first need to satisfy ourselves of the likelihood that there is some feature of the world in relation to which a creature is responding, but to which we do not normally react in the same way, and then we need to be able to find a way of correlating our responses with that same feature. Moreover, that this is something we are capable of doing is exemplified by the wide range of cases in which we have been able to come to understand the behavior of creatures in spite of the fact that aspects of their behavior involve responses to quite different features of the world those to which we respond – bees, for instance, respond to features of the world, specifically the polarization of light, of which we normally have no awareness, while dogs and cats have olfactory and auditory sensitivities that go far beyond the human. What this shows is that what is

crucial for understanding is not so much the particular responsive capacities we have to start with, but the fact that we have some such capacities. In this respect it is not the exact character of our access to the world that determines our capacity to understand, but rather the fact that we have some such access.

Yet, although the idea that the agreement necessary for interpretation must be an agreement founded in some 'common nature' is indeed a very common notion – so common, it seems, that even Davidson might sometimes be thought to fall prey to it – it nevertheless rests on a mistaken inversion of the structure of the interpretative process. It supposes that the agreement that ought properly to be understood as the outcome of interpretation – that is actually achieved in the interpretative process – is itself necessary, in some form, for interpretation to be possible. The results of interpretation are thus mistaken for the presuppositions of interpretation, and in this way the agreement at which interpretation aims – the agreement that supports a common understanding – is taken to be itself based on some prior and determinate agreement. Certainly charity generates specific assumptions on the basis of which interpretation can proceed. But those assumptions represent a part of the revisable horizon within which interpretation operates, as well as providing an initial starting point for such interpretation. The interpretative encounter is a process in which speaker and interpreter come to develop a common language and to articulate a shared set of attitudes, on the basis of the formal agreement of world and community that is expressed in the particular, and always defeasible, assumptions generated by charity. In this sense, agreement on specific matters is something arrived at through the interpretative process – since it makes possible an understanding even of disagreement – rather than its necessary presupposition.

As Gadamer says: 'hermeneutical conversation, like real conversation, finds a common language, and ... this finding of a common language is not, any more than in real conversation, the preparation of a tool for the purpose of understanding but, rather, coincides with the very act of understanding'.³² Much this sort of point is made by Davidson himself (though in, perhaps, more familiar language) in the paper 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' and also in 'Communication and Convention'. In the latter Davidson writes: 'it is very difficult to say exactly how speaker's and hearer's theories for interpreting the speaker's words must coincide. They must, of course, coincide after an utterance has been made, or communication is impaired ... Yet agreement on what a speaker means by what he says can surely be achieved even though speaker and hearer have different advance theories as to how to interpret the speaker.'³³

We do, in fact, assume agreement on many specific beliefs, attitudes, meanings and so forth in most commonplace interpretative situations. This is the principle of charity at work in its most inconspicuous and banal manner. It is at work when we ‘buy a pipe, order a meal, or direct a taxi-driver’.³⁴ And when those specific assumptions turn out to be wrong we revise them and try again. But prior agreement on such attitudes, meanings and practices is not essential to interpretation and communication. What is essential is only the formal agreement of world and community – an agreement that cannot be given any precise specification, but that is worked out in the process of coming to understand, and that is articulated in many forms in and through every interpretative encounter.

5.3.2 Whose charity? Whose agreement?

Recognition of the proper nature of the agreement expressed in the principle of charity is of particular importance insofar as a number of philosophers and social scientists have disputed the existence of any common ground that could unite otherwise diverse social groups. Mary Hesse, for instance, responds to the Davidsonian claim that interpretation proceeds by connecting utterances to ‘those familiar objects whose antics make our sentences true or false’³⁵ by asking: “‘What familiar objects?’ Sticks and stones, tables and chairs, stars and galaxies, seedtime and harvest, twins and birds, gods and spirits...? And whose objects? Those of the Nuer, the Lele, the Pythagoreans, the alchemists, Locke, Berkeley, or late 20th-century natural man?”³⁶ Hesse’s implicit answer is that there is no set of objects familiar to us all that could provide neutral interpretative ground. The Davidsonian answer, however, is that we do not need to look for neutral ground of this sort, and that the objects we look to, in the first instance, are the objects familiar to ourselves. Ultimately, however, it is not any particular set of objects that performs this task, but our location within a world wherein we can also locate other speakers and other objects. Such ‘location’, as discussed in chapter three, is not itself amenable to precise specification.

Of course, if one accepts the need for agreement in order to interpret – and that some agreement is necessary seems to be a fairly commonplace assumption³⁷ – but cannot actually locate any such agreement, then the likely conclusion will be that some form of relativism has to be adopted. If agreement is a matter of looking to the same ‘familiar objects’, and if the familiar objects of the Lele, the Nuer, or the

Pythagoreans are not also our familiar objects, then it seems likely that we will have great difficulty in understanding the Lele, the Nuer and the Pythagoreans. It may, indeed, be impossible for us to understand them. Such a conclusion has distinctly relativistic overtones. It is a conclusion that is the inevitable consequence, however, of taking agreement in terms of specific beliefs, concepts, practices or 'nature' as necessary for interpretation and communication. If we can only understand those whose particular beliefs and concepts we share, whose practices are also our practices, or who view the world in exactly the same way we ourselves do, then we will never be able to understand those with different attitudes or ways of life. Our ability to understand others would be an extremely limited ability.

Such limitation, however, is difficult to reconcile with the holistic character of the psychological. It does indeed seem to assume that there is always a unique way of interpreting any two horizontal systems (considered as sets of beliefs, systems of concepts or whatever) according to which they agree or disagree. But there is, of course, always more than one way of interpreting any portion of the psychological. And while there may be some difficulties in integrating different horizontal systems, such difficulties always have to be considered against both the ever-present possibility of reinterpretation expressed in terms of the indeterminacy of the psychological, and the possibility of revising the wider horizontal assumptions within which that comparative project is itself undertaken. The recognition of these holistic considerations means that Davidson is not driven to accept any relativistic limitation on our ability to understand. Indeed, such limitation cannot arise since the agreement on which interpretation rests, within the holistic, Davidsonian, account, is just the agreement consisting in a common world-horizon and in the rational unity of the community itself. Thus the 'familiar objects' of our everyday lives can also be taken to be the familiar objects of the Lele, the Nuer and the Pythagoreans, insofar as it is always possible to connect our beliefs about the world with theirs, and insofar as the possibility of such integration is indeed presupposed by our very encounter with such peoples. Our beliefs are beliefs about the same world, as they are locatable within the same world-horizon (one could also say that they are beliefs about the same objects under other descriptions). Certainly the principle of charity generates a more determinate level of assumed agreement within particular horizons. But the specific attributions generated by charity are always defeasible and revisable. Understanding thus aims at agreement on specific matters, and is facilitated through the

assumption of some level of agreement on such matters, but it is founded in the horizontal agreement of world and community.

These points relate to another objection that is sometimes made to the employment of charity in interpretation: the objection that charity is unwarrantedly ethnocentric. Certainly some ways of putting the arguments for charity can seem to depend on an assumption of western cultural and intellectual supremacy. The Davidsonian principle is itself sometimes read in this fashion. Ian Hacking, for instance, reads both Davidsonian charity and Grandyan humanity in this way, commenting that: ‘The very names given to these principles [of charity and humanity] and the fact that some writers invoke them as principles to translate the speech of “natives”, may raise a wry smile. “Charity” and “humanity” have long been in the missionary vanguard of colonising commerce. Our “native” may be wondering whether philosophical B-52’s and strategic hamlets are in the offing if he won’t sit up and speak like the English. Linguistic imperialism is better armed than the military.’³⁸ In a similar vein another writer says of charity that ‘it should really be called the principle of patronization.’³⁹ While this sort of reading may be understandable, it should by now be fairly obvious how much of it is a misreading of the principle of charity, at least as that principle arises in Davidson (and, perhaps, in Quine). Charity does not require that we be intolerant of differences or blind to disagreement. Tolerance, alone, however, will not aid in understanding. What understanding requires is certainly a willingness to listen and a willingness to recognize disagreement when it arises – such recognition is part of the dynamic of interpretation itself – but it also requires that we take speakers seriously: as inhabitants in the same world and members of the same overall community of persons.

The principle of charity is an expression of both the community of speakers and the common world-horizon within which those speakers are located. It operates as a holistic constraint on interpretation directed at maintaining the overall integration of the psychological and of the different elements within it – including the theories of interpretation we develop; it establishes the horizons of our interpretative activity; and it provides a starting point for specific interpretative projects by prescribing the assumption of a similarity in particular beliefs and attitudes between speaker and interpreter in order to provide an initial theory of attitudes. But, given what I have already said about the revisable, defeasible and flexible character of charity, it is obvious that as a methodological principle it offers little in the way of detailed advice as to exactly *how* agreement and truth should be preserved. We should not, as I pointed out earlier, expect too

much from charity. Clearly, in any particular case, we will be advised to assume agreement and truth on those beliefs and attitudes most directly relevant to the focus of the interpretative project in question. Charity, however, will not tell us what beliefs are to count as ‘directly relevant’, nor will it tell us how many of those beliefs can be in error, nor how much disagreement can be allowed before we are forced to revise our assumptions. Thus the horizons charity establishes will always remain incomplete and indeterminate (as is surely only to be expected), while the initial theories of belief it generates will themselves represent only partial theories of attitudes for speakers. They may well specify only those attitudes relevant to the particular interpretative encounter. The prescriptions generated by charity will thus reflect the localized character of the psychological in general, and of interpretation in particular. The horizons established by charity in our attempts to interpret the utterances of a mountain-dwelling Romanian goatherd may presuppose nothing about her beliefs concerning the current price of coffee on the New York commodities exchange, though it may presuppose a good many attitudes about goats and mountains. Such presuppositions will be similarly reflected in our initial hypotheses about the attitudes of our goat-herding friend.

5.3.3 The ambiguities of agreement

The difficulty in making the requirements of charity precise has been recognized explicitly by Davidson.⁴⁰ He does, however, suggest that the principle is directed more at certain classes of beliefs than others: ‘agreement on laws and regularities usually matters more than agreement on cases; agreement on what is open and publicly observable is more to be favored than agreement on what is hidden, inferred or ill-observed’.⁴¹ Yet such advice does little to solve the problem of the apparent methodological imprecision of charity. It merely transfers the problem on to questions as to what is to count as ‘publicly observable’ and ‘open’ and how much agreement on these things ‘matters more’ or is ‘more to be favored’. How those notions are to be understood depends, once again, on the particular horizons within which interpretation proceeds. Indeed, as I pointed out in chapter two (§2.2.2), while interpretation may be seen as beginning with the interpreting of sentences closely tied to the observable environment (understood in a fairly narrow sense), what counts as part of the speaker’s environment may widen as the ability to interpret is extended. Thus the distinction between what is publicly observable and what is not so observable depends on the

interpretative horizons that have been established. There is, moreover, no privileged horizontal viewpoint from which such issues could be finally decided.

Interpretation always remains largely a matter of the judgment of the interpreter: it is up to the interpreter to judge how best to reconcile tensions between particular attributions of belief or ascriptions of meaning; it is up to the interpreter to judge what attitudes are most relevant in a particular interpretative circumstance. There will always be more than one way of reconciling interpretative tension, and more than one assessment as to which attitudes are relevant. Interpretation is not a mechanical procedure governed by any set of clearly defined, pre-existing rules. Interpretation is precisely a matter of juggling with the various elements of the psychological until a satisfying and acceptable fit is achieved. The measure of success here is the degree to which the problems that initially baulked the otherwise smooth flow of understanding are no longer a source of difficulty – interpretation is successful when, and to the degree that, we can go on. As interpretation is not reducible to a set of determinate procedures, so charity is equally resistant to being given any precise specification. This merely reinforces the point I made earlier to the effect that the introduction of charity as an explicit principle of interpretation is unlikely to result in any major change in interpretative practice. If the analysis presented here is correct, then charity is a principle that follows directly from the nature of the psychological itself. The principle is thus not imposed on existing interpretative practice from without, but is already embedded within it. As Davidson points out ‘charity is not an option but a condition of having a workable theory’.⁴² It is a principle already implicit in those ‘workable’ theories that we have already constructed; it is implicit in all our understanding.

One consequence of the flexibility and methodological ambiguity of charity is that appeal to the principle will seldom enable us to adjudicate between competing interpretative theories or strategies. The methodological guidance offered by charity will be too open to interpretation itself to allow for a clear application in every instance. Thus it may well be a matter of dispute as to which of two competing theories best preserves the overall agreement and truth of a speaker’s beliefs. Moreover, the indeterminacy of interpretation means that there will always be more than one theory that is adequate for the interpretation of speakers. Davidson claims, of course, that the application of charity will greatly reduce such indeterminacy. Yet there is little reason, on the account Davidson himself offers, to think that this will be so (except, perhaps, in some particular cases) – the very flexibility of charity tells against such a possibility. Charity

may, however, reduce indeterminacy in the same way that indeterminacy is reduced by horizontality. Within a particular interpretative horizon the application of charitable considerations may well be given a more precise determination – but only within that horizon. The difficulty, of course, is that the horizons within which projects are constituted are themselves subject to modification and alteration. Consequently the reduction in indeterminacy is not only local, it is also very temporary.

Yet there will be some cases where charity will lead us to prefer certain theories and to discard others. Thus charity will operate against theories that offer clearly implausible or inadequate interpretations of speakers, such as that of Paul and the martini-drinking philosopher in Grandy's example. It may also suggest that we should be suspicious of theories that suggest some large degree of real irrationality or inexplicability on the part of speakers – Lévy-Bruhl's famous notion of 'primitive mentality' is a good example here.⁴³ Charitable considerations may also be important in deciding between overall interpretative strategies. Fred D'Agostino and Howard Burdick, for example, have attempted to apply the principle of charity, and the theory of interpretation that goes with it, to the dispute between symbolist and literalist approaches in anthropology.⁴⁴

The methodological ambiguity of the principle of charity as it applies in the majority of interpretative situations is a direct consequence of the holism from which charity derives. The mere fact that our interpretation of particular attitudes and behavior is always dependent on how we interpret elsewhere implies that it will never be possible to provide a single specification of how to interpret speakers in general. The difficulty in making the requirements of charity precise, in fact, reflects a general difficulty in making precise the requirements of understanding itself. In discussing the methodological ambiguity of charity Davidson writes: 'The aim of interpretation is not agreement but understanding. My point has always been that understanding can be secured only by interpreting in a way that makes for the right sort of agreement. The "right sort", however, is no easier to specify than to say what constitutes a good reason for holding a particular belief.'⁴⁵ There is no formula for deciding on whether a specific belief should be held. It is a matter of judging, in each case, the evidence for that belief. Similarly there is no formula for deciding just what agreement will enable us to understand. Not only is understanding itself a matter of degree, but it is also dependent on what is to be understood and on our own existing beliefs and attitudes.

Interpretation arises as an explicit process because of some inability to understand because we are somehow baulked in the carrying through of our interpretative project. This is so whether the problem we confront is in the form of a baffling utterance or some strange item of behavior. What is required if we are to understand a speaker is that we be able to fit together the speaker's behavior and attitudes into a reasonable, coherent system. But being able to do this also requires being able to fit that behavior and those attitudes with our own psychological system. Since the psychological realm is a realm constituted by the relations between its elements, so the understanding of any particular element can only be achieved through understanding the relations between that element and other elements. When it is the belief (or desire, fear, hope, action or utterance) of another speaker that is to be understood, then this requires locating that belief, first, in the system of psychological relations of the speaker and, second, in the system of psychological relations that includes our own beliefs as well as those of the speaker. The simplest way in which this is evident is in terms of the need to locate the speaker's belief against a worldly background that is common to both speaker and interpreter. Insofar as that background is indeed shared, so it represents a background of shared belief (and of many shared desires, fears, hopes and practices also). Here the requirement of charity – assume that the speaker has much the same beliefs as do you, the interpreter – can be seen as a direct consequence of holism. It is, indeed, nothing more than an expression of the holism that is the characteristic feature of the psychological.

Given the holistic nature of charity, it will be no more amenable to a precise formulation than it will be possible to specify all the beliefs (desires, fears, hopes and practices) that are presupposed by some particular belief. It will be no easier to say what charity requires than it is to say what beliefs are to count as 'reasonable' or than it is to specify the connections a belief must have with the rest of the speaker's, and our own, psychology for it to be understood. For these reasons alone any attempt to formulate a more precise version of the principle of charity must inevitably fail. Consequently, much of the argument about whether to prefer humanity (or some other principle) to the principle of charity is irrelevant. There is no precise specification of the principle, because there is no way of specifying precisely what is required for understanding.

At least one writer has suggested that charity should be replaced by a principle of explanatory adequacy,⁴⁶ according to which we should prefer those theories of interpretation that best explain the

behavior of the speaker. Certainly holism will itself lead us to prefer such theories, since they will better integrate that which is to be understood with the rest of our beliefs. It should be obvious, however, that such a move offers nothing in the way of more precise methodological guidance. The notion of explanatory adequacy must itself be affected by exactly the same difficulties that beset the attempt to specify what counts as good evidence for a belief or in what understanding itself is to consist. Any attempt to develop a more precise notion will only be successful, if at all, within some particular horizon. Replacing the principle of charity with a principle of explanatory adequacy is, moreover, to lose sight of the original Davidsonian point of the intimate connection between agreement and understanding; a connection that is itself a reflection of the holistic structure of understanding and of the psychological realm in which it arises.

5. 4 The nature of understanding

5.4.1 Charity, familiarity and the limits of the new

That understanding and agreement are indeed connected is a consequence of the holism of the psychological. Holism thus seems to imply a conception of understanding according to which understanding is primarily a matter of integrating what is to be understood into an existing framework of beliefs and other attitudes. The principle of charity is an expression of this holism. In this respect it is significant that, in Quine, the principle of charity is really just a particular application of a more general idea that Quine discusses in Word and Object: the idea that one of the guiding considerations in theory construction is familiarity or conservatism.⁴⁷ The principle of familiarity is the requirement that, all things being equal, one should prefer those theories that make use of our existing conceptual and theoretical apparatus rather than introduce new and unfamiliar ideas. In 'Posits and Reality' this is one principle, amongst others,⁴⁸ which Quine claims is satisfied by the molecular theory in physics insofar as 'the already familiar laws of motion are made to serve where independent laws would otherwise have been needed'.⁴⁹

In the case of both charity and familiarity we are exhorted to build our theories on the basis of what we already know; to use our existing beliefs and concepts to grapple with the unfamiliar. As Barry Stroud writes in explaining Quinean conservatism 'explanation must be given in a language that we can understand, since only then will the alleged possibility have been shown to make sense within the only terms we have for making sense of anything... What is open to us in the way of new modes of speech and

thought is controlled or determined by what we have now. Any allegedly new possibility must be capable of being fitted into, or understood in terms of, our present conceptual or linguistic apparatus.⁵⁰ In this respect the principle of familiarity, as well as the principle of charity, can be seen as deriving directly from the thesis of psychological holism. Indeed, the other principles Quine takes as guiding theory construction – simplicity, fecundity, scope and observational confirmation – can also be seen as being founded in the same holism, since each of these contribute to the unification and integration of the phenomenal. This is clearly so in the case of observational confirmation. If some theory were not substantially confirmed by our observations, then holistic considerations alone would likely favor its rejection, on the grounds that it offered only an inadequate articulation or integration of the phenomena within our overall system of belief. Fecundity and scope can be seen to be similarly justified, since they add to the unification and integration of beliefs and experience. And, insofar as a simpler theory is a more integrated theory (provided that the other requirements are equally satisfied), so holism will, for the most part, lead us to prefer those ‘simpler’ theories.

Such principles as these will, however, always be subject to flexibility in their application just as charity is. They will offer no strict guidance as to what theories to prefer or when one theory should be abandoned in favor of another. Thus Kuhn points out that, even though a new theoretical paradigm may gradually come to acquire enough supporters to supplant older ways of thinking, there will still be those scientists who remain unconvinced and yet who remain properly members of the scientific community: ‘Though the historian can always find men – Priestley, for instance – who were unreasonable to resist for as long as they did, he will not find a point at which resistance becomes illogical or unscientific’.⁵¹ The application of considerations of familiarity, simplicity and the rest will always be a matter of the judgment of individual scientists; it will always be a matter of juggling these considerations in the way that seems most appropriate. What we cannot do – what the holism of the psychological and of understanding rules out – is to specify in advance how such considerations should be applied. There is no mechanical rule for evaluating theories – neither in interpreting speakers nor in interpreting the world.⁵²

The idea of understanding or interpretation as a matter of integration with existing beliefs is mirrored in Davidson’s conception of interpretation itself. As we saw in chapter two, while Davidson does not think that any theory of translation is adequate as a theory of interpretation, he does conceive of a

theory of interpretation as taking the form of a theory of translation of a certain form – one that gives insight into the recursive structure of the language. Thus Davidson conceives of interpretation as essentially translational.⁵³ Such a translational conception of understanding can be seen as implied by holism itself; not in the sense that all understanding is modeled on linguistic translation, but in the sense that understanding involves the translation of what is to be understood into terms that we are already familiar with. Here, once again, we find a clear echo of Davidsonian themes in Gadamerian hermeneutics. Emphasizing the interpretative, and hence, also, linguistic character of understanding Gadamer writes: ‘All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter’s own language.’⁵⁴

That some principle of familiarity is unavoidable in understanding does not, however, seem to be quite the Quinean view. Quine himself sometimes seems to talk as if it was something that is really just a matter of intellectual laziness or habit. We use old ideas because they are already there rather than because we cannot find new ones. Our preference for the familiar is thus presented by Quine as a consequence of nothing more than our own mental inertia – an inertia that can be overcome.⁵⁵ Such a view is reinforced by Quine’s repeated talk of how, while conceptual revision is always piecemeal, radical change in our concepts is nonetheless possible: ‘we must not leap to the fatalistic conclusion that we are stuck with the conceptual scheme that we grew up in. We can change it bit by bit, plank by plank, though meanwhile there is nothing to carry us along but the evolving conceptual scheme itself. The philosopher’s task was well compared by Neurath to that of a mariner who must rebuild his ship on the open sea.’⁵⁶

The Neurath image is one of Quine’s most-used metaphors, appearing at a number of places in his work.⁵⁷ It goes with a Quinean emphasis on conceptual continuity rather than familiarity. Thus, on Quine’s account, conceptual change has to be local – ‘bit by bit, plank by plank’ – but many such local modifications are seen as eventually leading to global change. Quinean conservatism amounts, then, only to the claim that we have to work with what we already have. But it places no restrictions on possible changes so long as continuity is maintained. As Quine himself says ‘We are limited in how we can start even if not in where we end up.’⁵⁸

Quine is certainly correct in insisting on the necessity of conceptual continuity even in the face of conceptual change. Conceptual revision is indeed a local process. It takes place always within particular

horizons. But, of course, the idea that such local modifications can cumulatively result in global change must be mistaken. It is mistaken largely because of the impossibility of even taking the system of beliefs in general as an object of interpretation. Insofar as it is not possible to provide a complete specification of the psychological realm, so it is not possible to completely specify the beliefs held by a speaker. If it is not possible to do this, then there is no basis on which one can judge that there has been a global change in a speaker's beliefs. But, of course, the idea of a global change in beliefs also seems to omit the fact that what is never open to change is the ultimate presupposition of community and world. To make use of Quine's image from Neurath – the actual planks of our ship may change, but its overall design and its location on the sea and beneath the sky remain constant.

This is not to deny that sense can be attached to the notion of conceptual novelty or innovation. Nor is it to deny that we might be able to encounter what is new or alien. Indeed it is precisely the experience of novelty and strangeness that gives rise to the explicit need for interpretation. We encounter the new and the strange every day in dealing with new expressions or names, unusual usages and errors – whenever we come across a puzzling belief or some apparently inexplicable behavior either at home or abroad. There is, however, no such thing as the intrinsically novel or the intrinsically alien. The new and the strange are so only with respect to particular horizons, and always presuppose a familiar background in order that they can be seen at all. There are thus limits to the idea of novelty or strangeness. The idea of something that can be brought into no sort of connection whatsoever with any of our existing concepts or beliefs is the idea of something we can never encounter – indeed it is not the idea of anything at all.⁵⁹

Novelty and strangeness thus stand in the same relation to the old and familiar as error and difference stand to truth and agreement. While locally novel phenomena and ideas are always possible, they presuppose an immediate background of more familiar things and a global horizon that is itself unchanging. As Gadamer writes: 'Misunderstanding and strangeness are not the first factors, so that avoiding misunderstanding can be regarded as the specific task of hermeneutics. Just the reverse is the case.

Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world.'⁶⁰ Gadamer's comments serve as a reminder that, while the interpretative project may arise out of the encounter with the new and unfamiliar, it is the common background of agreement – the specific

agreement generated by charity and the more formal agreement of world and community – that makes interpretation itself possible.

Both charity and the principle of familiarity derive from the holistic character of understanding and of the psychological. The similarity between these two principles suggests some basic similarities between the methodologies of both the physical and the social or human sciences. In both cases we are concerned to integrate phenomena within a wider framework of beliefs and attitudes; to integrate phenomena within a particular horizon. Such similarity should not, however, be taken to show that the physical and human sciences are indistinguishable from one another. While both the physical and the human sciences are governed by the same holistic constraints – the same requirements of integration within horizons – this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that how such constraints apply, and how such integration is maintained, will differ greatly from one discipline to another, just as the terms employed, and the objects inquired into, will also differ.

There is, moreover, a fundamental divide between the physical and human sciences that mirrors a deep divide between the physical and the psychological realms as such. The principle of charity is, on the holistic account developed here, the fundamental principle governing the methodology of the human sciences. As a methodological principle, it derives from a more fundamental psychological thesis, that of psychological holism, according to which the very elements of the psychological are holistically constrained. Thus the practice of the human sciences, and particularly of psychological inquiry, is constrained by the holistic principle of charity, while the subject of psychological inquiry – the human realm – is also holistically constituted. In the case of the physical sciences, inquiry is also constrained by a holistic principle, the principle of familiarity, that is grounded in the holism of the psychological. The subject of such inquiry, the physical realm, is not, however, constituted by the same holism.⁶¹ The physical realm may well have a holistic structure of its own, but it will not be a rational structure. Thus, while psychological holism determines the structure of theory construction in both the physical and the social sciences, it does not determine that physical reality that is the object of scientific study.

It may be that this sort of idea is what lies behind Quine's claim (discussed in §1.2) that the indeterminacy of translation is additional to the usual underdetermination of theory by evidence that afflicts physical theory (and so may be seen as enabling the preservation of the distinction, which Davidson may

otherwise seem to ignore, between indeterminacy and underdetermination). Moreover, it certainly it provides a way of making more sense of Davidson's claim that the conditions imposed by charity (conditions of 'coherence, rationality and consistency') 'have no echo in physical theory'.⁶² While familiarity does, indeed, represent the methodological analogue of charity in physical theory, it cannot be viewed as having any constitutive role to play with respect to the actual subject matter of such theory. Charity, however, since it expresses the fundamental holism of the psychological, can be seen as both methodological and (insofar as it expresses the broad, rational, unity of the psychological) constitutive.

5.4.2 Understanding, translation and theory

The principle of charity is, as we have seen, a principle that can be taken to embody a particular conception of understanding as a movement from the alien back to the familiar – what sometimes amounts to a translational model of understanding. The idea that interpretation and understanding should be treated on such a model has, however, given rise to a certain amount of criticism directed both at Davidson,⁶³ and, usually independently, at Gadamer. In particular, it is argued, it is ludicrous to suppose that such a translational model could apply in the case of our understanding of our home language, either in understanding our own or our neighbor's utterances. Much this sort of point is made, though not specifically with respect to Davidson, by Barry Barnes and David Bloor, but they put it in a way that also presents the point as an explicit attack on the assumption of charity itself:

Translation is not the most direct attack on meaning that is available. It was not available, nor did it play any part at all, in the first major attack that any of us made upon meaning when we acquired language in childhood. First language acquisition is not a translation process, and nothing that is absent here can be a necessary ingredient in subsequent learning. To understand an alien culture the anthropologist can proceed in the way that native speakers do. Any difficulties in achieving this stance will be pragmatic rather than a priori. There is, for instance, no necessity for the learner to assume shared concepts. Such an assumption would have nothing but nuisance value.⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that this sort of strategy is one explicitly considered, and rejected, by Quine, in Word and Object, as a possible alternative to the techniques of radical translation. Quine comments that: 'of course the truth is that he [the interpreter] would not have strictly simulated the infantile situation in

learning the native language, but would have helped himself to analytical hypotheses all along the way; thus the elements of the situation would in practice be pretty inextricably scrambled'.⁶⁵ One might add that the interpreter would also have helped him (or her) self to charitable hypotheses all along the way. These are important points to bear in mind in response to the Barnes-Bloor type objection, but a more important (and perhaps more telling) response is that this sort of objection seems, once again, to depend on a failure to understand the holism on which the Davidsonian conception of understanding, and the principle of charity that is so central to it, is based.

Part of the mistake made by critics such as Barnes and Bloor,⁶⁶ at least where Davidson (and also Gadamer) is concerned, is to focus solely on the notion of translation. Translation is only relevant here insofar as it provides an illustration, or, perhaps better, a metaphor, of the nature of understanding as it is determined by the holistic character of the psychological. Given that the psychological is a system of differences in which coherence or rationality is the governing principle, then understanding must always be a matter of integration or re-integration within the psychological system as a whole. Such integration takes place within and through particular intentional-horizonal structures – through particular projects. This account of understanding is one that can be applied to the interpretative efforts of the anthropologist, and also, though in a different way, to the developing understanding of the child. In the latter case, the development of the child's understanding is, in part, a matter of establishing a psychological system of a certain richness and complexity to begin with; but it can also be viewed as a process of gradually expanding and enriching the horizons of the psychological itself. It is a matter of the child growing into a world and into a horizon, and this is at the same time a process of familiarization – a process of coming to be at home. Here we have obviously moved far from what might ordinarily be thought to be associated with the notion of translation, and so it must be admitted that the translation metaphor will not always be a good metaphor to use. Indeed, it will probably work well only where we already have some understanding of translation as itself taking place against a holistic background – obviously such an understanding of translation cannot be assumed.⁶⁷ Yet, of course, neither Davidson nor Gadamer make the idea of translation central to their accounts of understanding nor do I put great reliance on the idea. Translation plays some part in Davidson's specification of the form of a theory of meaning (see §2.1.1), but it does not play a large part in his description of the project of radical interpretation.

There is a further style of objection to the Davidsonian account, and its reliance on charity, that is closely related to the complaint about translation. One of the reasons for objecting to any translational conception of understanding is that it seems to imply that understanding our own language is a translational process and yet, following the line of argument sketched above, this seems manifestly implausible. Similarly, Davidson's emphasis on the ubiquity of interpretative problems – 'The problem of interpretation' he writes 'is domestic as well as foreign'⁶⁸ – seems to suggest that even speakers of our own language represent an interpretative problem to us. And this may appear just as implausible as the claim that we are involved in translation every time we converse over the back fence. In this vein Ian Hacking comments that: 'It is as if everytime that I enter into conversation with another, I have to hold before me the possibility that he is an alien.'⁶⁹

In one way I find Hacking's comment here a strange comment to hear in the late twentieth century. For surely one of the most powerful features of twentieth-century culture has been precisely the experience of the alien intruding into the familiar. The experience of modernity might indeed be characterized, in part, as an encounter with the unfamiliar. This is certainly a feature of modern, particularly twentieth-century, art and culture – the lesson of the surrealist movement, for instance, has surely been that even at home the alien can intrude. Perhaps Hacking would take this point and, indeed, he himself refers to a popular cinematic version of this theme – the various versions of the film The Bodysnatchers,⁷⁰ in which malevolent alien beings take on human form. I suspect, however, that Hacking would not see this as countering his objection. This is because Hacking treats Davidson as actually committed, not simply to the claim that interpretation is a domestic as well as foreign problem insofar as we can always experience difficulties in understanding at home as well as abroad (a claim that is surely not at all objectionable), but to the stronger claim that every act of understanding is also an act of interpretation that scarcely alters whether there is explicit difficulty in understanding or not.⁷¹ Certainly there is much in Davidson to support this latter view. It is a view reinforced by Davidson's conception of the task of radical interpretation as concerned with constructing a theory of meaning that would enable the understanding of the utterances of a speaker. In 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs' Davidson seems to make explicit the assumption that linguistic understanding is, indeed, a matter of the application of an interpretative theory or

theories. This reading of Davidson is not peculiar to Hacking. It is repeated in the work of Dreyfus⁷² and elsewhere.⁷³

Davidson has himself refrained from making any claims about the psychological reality of the theories that he discusses. He writes that:

To say that an explicit theory for interpreting a speaker is a model of the interpreter's linguistic competence is not to suggest that the interpreter knows any such theory ... claims about what would constitute a satisfactory theory are not ... claims about the propositional knowledge of an interpreter, nor are they claims about the details of the inner workings of some part of the brain. They are rather claims about what must be said to give a satisfactory description of the linguistic competence of the interpreter. We cannot describe what an interpreter can do except by reference to a recursive theory of a certain sort.⁷⁴

Davidson has himself talked of meaning as a 'theoretical construct'.⁷⁵ Explicit theories of interpretation, of the sort referred to here, are no less 'theoretical constructs', and so can be viewed as abstractions from, or partial formalizations of, the practice of interpretation and the process of understanding itself. As such those 'theories' will always be inadequate representations of what is involved in understanding, and inadequate representations of actual interpretative practice. This point, however, does not deflect the original criticism. To see how that criticism might be mistaken, we need, instead, to look at the wider account within which the Davidsonian position might be embedded, and to look more closely at the structure of understanding itself.

This structure (and the structure of explicit interpretative practice) is what I have tried to characterize more fully in preceding pages in terms of the intentional-horizonal structure of the psychological. The ideas outlined there provide an account of a basic structure that applies to the psychological in general, as well as to understanding, and to particular interpretative projects that arise where the smooth progress of understanding is somehow blocked. Explicit interpretative theories can be seen as attempts to partially model some aspects of this structure. In particular they can be seen as modeling aspects of the horizonal presuppositions that structure understanding in general, and interpretative projects in particular. Since all understanding arises within some horizonal framework (a framework that cannot be given any complete or precise theoretical specification), so there are always 'assumptions' (what

Heidegger calls pre-understandings and Gadamer calls ‘prejudices’) that structure and make possible the act of understanding itself. Theories of interpretation can be seen as theoretical structures in which certain such assumptions are made explicit and are consequently formalized. We would, however, be misled if we assumed that those theoretical structures were identical with the horizon itself. That cannot be so, since the horizon always remains, insofar as it is horzonal, at the edge of our field of view. Once we have an explicit theory then, so long as that theory remains determinate, it remains part of the object, part of the focus, of the project, rather than properly part of the horizon.⁷⁶

Interpretation is thus a problem at home as well as abroad, because interpretative difficulty – which requires the explicit working through of our assumptions – is always a possibility, even if it is not always realized. And, when it is realized, it sometimes requires only a very rapid and relatively minor re-working of the horizons of understanding. Interpretation is also always present, in another sense, insofar as all our understanding is located within certain horizons and with respect to certain objects. We can attempt to model aspects of those horizons within explicit theories of interpretation, though what we end up with is something that is both more determinate (at least within the horizons of our project) and narrower than the horizon itself. Thus, what the criticisms of Hacking and others show is, in fact, the need for a more integrated account of the holistic background to the Davidsonian account. It is just such an integrated account that I have aimed to present in the previous two chapters.

5.5 Charity and morality

There is one area in which the principle of charity has been applied about which I have so far said nothing – the area of moral theory. Most often, this has been in terms of the extent to which evaluative considerations can be set apart from the attempt to interpret other speakers, and the extent to which we can make sense of the idea of evaluative and practical frameworks radically different from our own. The principle of charity certainly suggests that there will be limits to the extent of such difference. A number of writers have taken the Davidsonian position to have a significant bearing on questions of evaluative neutrality in interpretation as well as on the issue of moral relativism.⁷⁷ Yet although a number of Davidson’s writings have been important in areas of moral philosophy – particularly his various discussions of akrasia⁷⁸ – Davidson has not himself written in any systematic nor extended fashion on the

central issues of moral theory. It has always been clear, however, that the assumption of agreement in interpretation involves not merely the assumption of mostly true and agreed upon beliefs, but a sharing of evaluative commitments also,⁷⁹ while the rejection of relativism that is associated with this idea does not distinguish between ethical and other forms of relativism. More recently, Davidson has, in fact, developed some of these ideas at greater length applying the lessons of radical interpretation, along with the ideas of charity and indeterminacy, as well as the concept of triangulation, directly to issues concerning the objectivity of values. His arguments in these cases are analogous to the arguments he deploys elsewhere. Thus, in 'Objectivity and Practical Reason', Davidson argues that 'interpreting evaluative judgments rests on the same foundation as interpreting the other attitudes: understanding depends on common ground. Given enough common ground, we can understand and explain differences, we can criticize, compare and persuade.'⁸⁰

We have already seen, in previous chapters, the important role that notions of agreement and objectivity play in all understanding and in the constitution of the psychological as such; the Davidsonian argument against relativism, of which the argument against ethical relativism can be seen as a particular instance, will also be explored further in the next chapter. It seems likely, however, that the holistic account of understanding, and of the psychological, that is to be found in Davidson's work will have implications for moral theory that extend further than just the affirmation of the objectivity of value or the rejection of ethical relativism. While I cannot properly do justice to those implications here, it nevertheless seems worth going some way towards considering what those implications might be.

The requirements of holism set constraints on the way in which interpretation can proceed. In this respect holism can be seen as a constraint on forms of discourse. Relativistic discourse (at least in some forms) turns out to violate certain requirements that are presupposed by the possibility of discourse itself – notably requirements embodied in the principle of charity. But as it is the general thesis of holism that is primary here, so the holistic constraints operate, not merely through charity against relativism, but as quite general constraints on all discourse. Fundamentally, one might say, discourse is governed by a requirement of consistency or rationality, and by a presupposition of a common world and community. Moral discourse will be governed by these constraints as much as any other form of discourse. Moreover, holism does not just constrain ordinary many-person discourse. Holism constrains the psychological realm itself. Any belief

or attitude or behavior is constrained by the holistic requirement. Holism must thus operate as a constraint on moral beliefs, and on evaluative decisions and the actions that flow from those decisions, as much as it constrains the rest of our beliefs and actions. In this fashion holism may well have more fundamental implications for moral theory than we might at first have thought.

Holism does not set any limits to the requirement of overall consistency. It extends to include, not just individuals, but the whole realm of attitude and action – to include the community of persons as a whole. The requirements of consistency that flow from holism thus extend to encompass the community as a whole rather than operating with respect to each individual. The necessary involvement of the individual in the community is such that the notion of community is always presupposed even in the individual's own perceptions of herself. Individuals are constituted against the background of the community. Decisions as to how to act must therefore take account of the beliefs and attitudes of other members of the community. Not to do so is not merely a violation of some abstract moral injunction, but is a violation of the holism that constitutes persons as such. Not to do so is to compromise one's own rationality and, therefore, one's own person-hood. Taking account of other persons will mean taking account of their beliefs and preferences in much the same way as we take account of our own. The preferences of another cannot be discounted just because they are those of another, for the holism of the psychological operates with respect to the community of individuals as a whole.

The need to take the preferences of others into account does not mean, however, that one must act on the preferences of others or that one should attempt to realize the preferences of everyone. In the previous chapter we saw how the psychological realm can be seen as organized around various horizontal structures – various localized psychological unities. A person is such a unity acting on the basis of the preferences that are constituted as part of that unity. Consequently holism does not require the discounting of those preferences, but merely recognition of how those preferences impinge on the preferences of others and, where appropriate, a willingness to adjust one's own preferences in the light of those others. One could put this into slightly different language and say that one of the ethical implications of holism is that concern for ourselves is inseparable from concern for others.⁸¹ This way of putting it is useful because, of course, our different relations with others can be partly expressed in terms of different relations of ethical concern. So the way in which ethical concern is differentiated in our relations with others (as well as

operating to differentiate those relations), allows us to see better how our ethical relations may be affected by the localized character of the psychological, even while we are nevertheless always committed to a concern for others that goes beyond any particular local involvement.

Of course, the ethical holism that may be derived from psychological holism does not provide us with any substantive moral rules. And this is to be expected. The constraints imposed by holism remain always extremely flexible – they operate to constrain the psychological system at a broad level rather than in terms of individual beliefs, attitudes or actions. Just how to take account of the preferences of others is thus something that is always a matter of judgment in each individual case. Holism offers no more guidance in ethical matters than it does in questions of the assessment of rationality. It cannot tell us what we ought to do or ought not to do in advance of any actual situation. Even then there may be a certain indeterminacy as to the correct course of action – the constraints of holism cannot uniquely determine action. In fact we might take holism, not as giving rise to any particular moral theory as such, but as setting out some of the limits within which moral discourse – along with all other discourse – must operate.

Discourse is constituted holistically and is constrained by the holistic nature of the psychological. This is so for all discourse. The holistic character of discourse means that discourse has to be understood as always involving a community of voices – discourse is not an event or a process in which otherwise independent, individual voices come together. The holistic nature of the psychological prevents the possibility of considering individual voices independently of the community of voices to which they belong. Thus, as we have seen, it is not possible to separate one-person discourse from many-person discourse. Our own working through of a problem or a train of thought possesses the same dialogic structure as does our conversation with another person, and, in all such cases, the wider horizon of the community of speakers and of the world are equally implicated. Sometimes, of course, particular discourses, and the individual voices participating in those discourses, can be viewed independently of the wider background within which they are situated. Indeed one can always ‘abstract off’ particular, localized structures from the wider holistic background. Thus one can treat particular languages, discourses, conversations or whatever as structures standing in some sense on their own, as parts of wider systems or, indeed, as able to be broken down into smaller sub-structures. This point shall become an important one in the next chapter, as I move on to discuss conceptual schemes, relativism and skepticism.

III. REALITY, KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

6. A holistic ‘theory’ of knowledge

Holism is the dominating feature of the psychological realm. It is also the characteristic feature of understanding itself. One consequence of such holism is that it is impossible to separate out any independent elements of the psychological. Belief, desire, action – these only make sense within a framework of other beliefs, desires and actions, and within a wider framework of person-hood, community and world. Certainly one may abstract out particular elements, but they always remain an abstraction from the holistic structure within which they properly belong. The notion of world provides the overall framework within which all these concepts are organized. It is first and foremost the notion of the world-horizon – the notion of the formal unity within which our interpretative projects are carried on, and within which our lives as persons within a community are constituted. Thus we cannot conceive of attitudes, actions, persons or communities independently of their place within the world. Yet much modern philosophical thinking seems to have been founded on the assumption of a dualism of subjective mind and objective world, in which each is, to some extent, independent of the other. In epistemology this leads to skeptical and relativistic possibilities, while in metaphysics it leads to the dispute between idealism (or, more generally, anti-realism) and realism. The aim of this chapter is to examine such dualism, and the epistemological positions and problems associated with it, in the light of the holism set out in preceding chapters. The idea will be to apply the lessons of holism to the problems of knowledge, and to show how some of those problems may be resolved. The following, and final, chapter considers holism in relation to the problems of realism, anti-realism and truth. In both cases a common theme – the theme of Part III in general – is the way in which holism operates, first, against any view of our relation to the world that would treat that relation either as founded on our subjective confrontation of an objective world, or that would reduce the world to some subjective construct and, second, against any representationalist conception of the psychological realm also.

6.1 'The third dogma'

6.1.1 Schemes and their contents

There is a common philosophical tendency (and perhaps also a tendency that, in modern times, has become enshrined in common-sense thinking) to conceive of the realm of belief and attitude as clearly distinct from the world of objects and events. This separation is typically presented in terms of a distinction between subjective and objective – a distinction that sometimes appears (though not always) in a more particular form as a distinction between conceptual scheme and empirical content, or between language and world. Associated with this distinction is a particular view of knowledge and of the psychological in general. Knowledge is viewed as the product of the interpretation or organization of some independent (perhaps 'objective') experiential input by means of a (sometimes 'subjective') language or conceptual scheme, while the psychological realm in general is treated as a private realm with its own 'internal' objects and representations through which the world is categorized and understood. Thus, while Davidson himself has often focused primarily on the dichotomy of scheme and content, he also comments that: 'Instead of saying it is the scheme/content dichotomy that has dominated and defined the problems of modern philosophy ... one could as well say it is how the dualism of subjective and objective has been conceived. For these dualisms have a common origin: a concept of the mind with its private states and objects.'¹ It is not, of course, the notion of objectivity as such that is at issue here, but a particular notion of objectivity that is contrasted with subjectivity, as public is with private. The particular expression of this subjective-objective dichotomy (and the private, representational' conception of the mind that goes with it) as given in the distinction between conceptual scheme and empirical content has been called by Davidson the 'third dogma' of empiricism.² It is this latter notion that is Davidson's own starting-point in his discussion of conceptual relativism in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'.³

It is, of course, Quine who identifies the analytic/synthetic distinction and the idea of reductionism as the first two dogmas of empiricism, and argues for their rejection in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'. In many respects, Davidson's identification of this third dogma (the distinction of conceptual scheme from empirical content), and his argument for its rejection, are merely an extension of the original Quinean position. As presented by Quine, the analytic/synthetic distinction purports to distinguish between those statements that are true by virtue of their meanings alone, and those statements that are true both by virtue

of meanings and the way of the world. Thus, analytic truths are held to be true because of linguistic (or conceptual) facts alone, while synthetic truths depend on both linguistic and extra-linguistic facts. The dogma of reductionism, in turn, consists in the idea that all statements can ultimately be recast in the language of pure sensory experience, or, more modestly perhaps, that any statement, taken in isolation, is capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed by experience. These two dogmas are, according to Quine, intimately connected:

The two dogmas are indeed, at root identical ... in general the truth of statements does obviously depend both upon language and upon extra-linguistic fact ... this obvious circumstance carries in its train, not logically but all too naturally, a feeling that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component. The factual component must, if we are empiricists, boil down to a range of confirmatory experiences. In the case where the linguistic component is all that matters, a true statement is analytic.⁴

Reductionism thus presupposes something like the analytic/synthetic distinction, as it also presupposes some version of the distinction between scheme and content. In fact, these three 'dogmas' all depend upon the one basic distinction expressed in various ways as a distinction between the conceptual and the empirical, the linguistic and the extra-linguistic, the subjective and the objective.

Here I am, of course, assuming that languages can be associated with conceptual schemes – that the linguistic and the conceptual can both be contrasted in a similar way with the empirical or the objective. Yet, if the analytic/synthetic distinction is maintained, then we can distinguish within a language between those statements that are true by virtue of meanings, and those that are true by virtue of the empirical facts also. A conceptual scheme could be associated only with the first of these: with the body of analytically true statements, and not with the total body of true statements possible within a language. It follows that if all three dogmas are maintained simultaneously, then analytic truths will be truths that involve statements about the concepts that go to make up a conceptual scheme (roughly speaking), while synthetic truths will involve statements about the empirical content of the scheme.

If, however, we abandon the analytic/synthetic distinction (as we may feel compelled to do by the Quinean critique), then the distinction between scheme and content will, assuming it is retained, be radically altered. The scheme/content distinction will no longer correspond to a distinction between the

theoretical and observational statements within a language, nor to a distinction between conceptual and empirical statements, for these distinctions will no longer be strictly acceptable as distinctions applicable within a language at all. Instead, the scheme/content dichotomy will remain viable only as a distinction between the interpreting, 'linguistic' scheme, identified with a language as a whole, and uninterpreted, nonlinguistic empirical content. Here the distinction between concept and fact, between language and experience, will have been pushed to the extreme. Such a conception of the scheme/content distinction may arise out of the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, or it may itself provide a position from which the notions of analyticity and reductionism may be attacked.

What is significant here is that it appears that the scheme/content dichotomy, and its extreme separation of the linguistic from the non-linguistic, can survive the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction. This is a point that Davidson emphasizes:

If we give up the [analytic/synthetic] dualism, we abandon the conception of meaning that goes with it, but we do not have to abandon the idea of empirical content; we can hold, if we want, that all sentences have empirical content. Empirical content is in turn explained by reference to the facts, the world, experience, sensation, the totality of sensory stimuli, or something similar. Meanings give us a way to talk about categories, the organizing structure of language and so on; but it is possible ... to give up meanings and analyticity while retaining the idea of language as embodying a conceptual scheme. Thus in place of the dualism of analytic/synthetic we get the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content... an empiricism ... shorn of the unworkable idea that we can uniquely allocate empirical content sentence by sentence.⁵

That the scheme/content distinction can indeed survive the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, even though both embody a very similar idea of the separation between the subjective and objective, is especially important. For, though some might demur at this suggestion, it seems that much contemporary analytic philosophy has largely rejected the first dogma under the influence of Quine. Significantly, however, there has been no such general rejection of the dichotomy of scheme and content. Indeed, the notion remains, even though in a variety of forms. Davidson himself proceeds to locate this dichotomy, and the associated notion of an untranslatable language, in the work of Whorl, Kuhn and Feyerabend, and even in the work of Quine himself.⁶

The arguments that press in favor of the abandonment of the analytic/synthetic distinction also operate against the scheme/content distinction. Thus, in Quine, the inseparability of meaning from information or belief is a major reason for rejecting the notion of analyticity. Quine argues that we cannot separate out the purely linguistic elements, in virtue of which a statement is supposed to be analytically true, from its associated beliefs. There is no pure meaning, no purely linguistic base, that would give warrant to the notion of analyticity.⁷ In Davidson, the inseparability of meaning and information reappears in the holism of meaning and attitude, thereby providing the basis for the rejection of the scheme -content distinction. Davidson's explicit argument against the distinction largely takes the form of an attack on the various metaphors that are employed to describe the relationship between a conceptual scheme and its empirical content. Davidson argues for the impossibility of making sense of such a relationship, given that one of the things related is typically dependent for its determinacy or organization on the other. So conceptual schemes are said, for instance, to 'organize' experience and where talk of organization is replaced by talk of a scheme 'fitting' the experiential evidence, it seems that all that is really meant is that the scheme (or the theory which the scheme embodies) is true.

At this point, Davidson's argument connects with his discussion of truth in 'True to the Facts'. In that paper Davidson elaborates an account of truth in the context of his theory of interpretation, claiming that talk of truth needs no reference to facts, or to things making sentences true.⁸ For, of course, it is really sentences or propositions that are true and false, and no fact (whatever that may be – for the idea of 'fact' is no less clear than the idea of 'truth'), nor any thing, can 'come into contact' with sentences to make them true. Moreover, for a sentence to 'be made true' is just for it to be true. What it is to be true for a sentence of a language is, of course, just what the Tarskian theory of truth aims to tell us – 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. 'Here' says Davidson 'there is no reference to a fact, a world, an experience, or a piece of evidence'.⁹

If to say that a scheme stands in some relation to a certain empirical content, is to say only that the scheme is true, then we might wonder whether the notion of scheme and content are actually doing any work here. Certainly it looks as if the notion of a scheme as distinct from some content is not a notion with any real content itself. And this, of course, is what the holistic nature of interpretation would lead us to expect. For if a conceptual scheme is considered as a set of beliefs, as most often it is considered, then we

cannot make sense of those beliefs independently of their connection, not only with utterances, but with the rest of the believer's psychology, as well as with the world that surrounds her. Indeed, we cannot investigate any one element of the psychological unity that is a person, without implicating all the others, as well as the world itself. In that case, we will be unable to separate out anything corresponding to a conceptual scheme that is independent either of the believer's overall psychology or of any 'empirical' content to which that conceptual scheme might be thought to relate – there will thus be no way of describing the relation between scheme and content that will leave them separate and distinct. This is the point of the Davidsonian critique: we can employ the notion of a conceptual scheme only so long as we do not imagine that in doing so we are talking about something that is separate from the world or from experience (from some content). Similarly, we can talk about a theory of belief, or a theory of meaning, so long as we keep in mind that such talk already has all the other elements of interpretation in the picture. Strictly speaking, we cannot treat one element independently of the other.

This way of putting things makes clearer the connection between Davidson's rejection of the scheme/content distinction, and his rejection of the idea of the psychological realm as a subjective, private realm, that possesses its own internal objects and states.¹⁰ It is this latter idea that is really at issue in Davidson's discussion of the subjective-objective distinction (and not, it should be pointed out, a notion of objectivity as such¹¹). For as we saw earlier (particularly at §3.4 and §3.5), we cannot conceive of the psychological realm as a realm completely and literally 'internal' to individual persons, or as independent of the world in which those persons are located. This point requires, as Davidson points out, no appeal to esoteric or elaborate thought experiments, but is merely a consequence of the nature of the psychological itself.¹²

The holistic structure of the psychological undermines the idea of any fundamental distinction between conceptual schemes and their empirical content. But it might nevertheless be thought that there is still some sense that we can attach to the notion of a conceptual scheme. It is the sense in which we can talk of particular 'horizons'. A conceptual scheme might be taken as a means of referring to such a horizon insofar as the horizon is taken as having some propositional or conceptual content. There are, however, at least two difficulties with such an approach. The first is that, as I have just emphasized, while the horizon may be given some propositional characterization, it cannot be given any complete propositional

characterization. Thus it will not be possible to talk of a conceptual scheme that corresponds to the overall horizon, for there is no way of specifying such a scheme or of establishing, once and for all, the propositional or conceptual content of a particular horizon.¹³ The second is that the horizon is not a structure that organizes or fits any content – empirical or otherwise. Rather the horizon is that within which a project is constituted. So, if we were to assimilate the idea of a conceptual scheme to a horizon, we would have to accept some consequent modification of the original concept of such a scheme, and recognize too that it could only represent or model a fragment of any horizon.

One strategy that fits reasonably well with the way the notion of a conceptual scheme has often been used in discussions within philosophy as well as other disciplines is to treat schemes as essentially theoretical structures. Thus a particular scheme represents a particular theoretical standpoint – a particular way of understanding some realm of phenomena. In that case schemes may be implicated as part of a horizon, but are probably better looked upon as structures constituted within horizons and within particular projects, or, better still, as abstractions from the horizontal structure itself – and this can be seen to correlate with the fact that no horizon can be given any complete propositional or conceptual specification. Thus, as I suggested earlier (§5.4.2), a particular theory of interpretation may be considered as the formalization of a particular horizon or fragment of a horizon – such a theory of interpretation may be counted, in this sense, as a scheme. This general way of treating the idea of a conceptual scheme fits neatly with the fact that most writers who employ the scheme idea seem to identify schemes with theories. Thus Stephan Körner talks about the conceptual scheme of Newtonian Physics,¹⁴ while Nicholas Rescher refers to the conceptual scheme of Galenic medicine.¹⁵ The tendency to treat schemes as theoretical structures reflects the more general tendency to treat the psychological realm itself, and our relation to the world, in primarily theoretical terms.¹⁶ The latter tendency is clearly at odds with holism, and so, while one may usefully treat schemes as ‘theories’, such schemes will remain always purely local structures that are constituted only within some wider, more encompassing horizon.

That some sense might nevertheless be attached to the idea of a conceptual scheme, even in the face of holistic considerations, is important. For the notion is a commonplace one, and an otherwise easy way of refuting the claim of the unintelligibility of the scheme idea is to point to its everyday and seemingly unproblematic usage in a number of contexts in which some such notion does indeed seem to be

called for.¹⁷ The holistic nature of the psychological does not rule out the existence of, as Davidson puts it, the ‘contrasts from epoch to epoch, from culture to culture, and person to person’¹⁸ that can be expressed using the scheme idea. Instead, it undermines the idea that the dichotomy of scheme and content can be viewed as ontologically or epistemologically basic. That dichotomy has to be seen as constituted only within the all-encompassing horizon of the world that is itself the ultimate horizon of the psychological.

Davidson’s rejection of the scheme/content distinction, and of the particular conception of the subjective-objective contrast that goes with it, is not a mere Davidsonian idiosyncrasy. It has an obvious connection with Wilfrid Sellars’ famous criticism of what he calls ‘the Myth of the Given’.¹⁹ Moreover, just as the discussion of Davidson in previous chapters has seen a number of parallels emerge between the Davidsonian approach and that of a number of other philosophers with the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, so the Davidsonian rejection of the scheme/content distinction and the associated subjective-objective dichotomy is itself reflected in the work of these philosophers. In particular, it is a prominent feature of Heidegger’s thinking, as well as Gadamer’s. Heidegger has already loomed fairly large in my discussion of what I termed the ‘intentional-horizonal’ structure of the psychological in chapter four, and will become even more important in my discussion of truth in chapter seven. It is Heidegger who first directs attention to the way in which our experience of things arises out of our everyday involvement with things in the world. To some extent, the Davidsonian argument against the idea of a conceptual scheme is paralleled by Heidegger’s much broader attack on what he calls the idea of the ‘world picture ... the world conceived and grasped as a picture’.²⁰ As with Davidson, Heidegger’s attack on this notion is tied up with his rejection of a representationalist view of the relation between human beings and the world, and his associated rejection of correspondence as expressing the essence of truth – although, for Heidegger, unlike Davidson, it is also an essential element in his rethinking of the nature of modern science and technology.²¹

6.2 Relativism, horizonality and psychological unity

6.2.1 The equivocal nature of relativism

Davidson summarizes his argument in ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’ as an argument for the unintelligibility of the doctrine, the ‘heady and exotic doctrine’, of conceptual relativism.²² In this respect,

it seems that Davidson assumes an account of relativism that ties the doctrine to the scheme/content distinction. As that distinction is rejected by Davidson, so too is conceptual relativism. It is, however, not always clear in just what relativism really consists. Certainly there are always difficulties in attempting to provide an uncontroversial characterization of the relativist position. For example, while many philosophers regard the idea that reality is socially constructed as a dangerously relativistic idea, many social constructivists would claim that their position is not relativistic at all. This is because relativism is often treated as a form of subjectivism, but the fact that reality is socially constructed does not mean that it is subjectively constructed. If reality is socially constructed, then it is independent of the beliefs or interests of any individual, and so is an intersubjective, and not a subjective, notion. The social constructivist can treat truth as similarly intersubjective, and may even claim to be able to deploy a notion of objectivity that is founded on the intersubjectivity of the social realm.

The social constructivist's denial of the charge of relativism suggests that there is a lack of consensus as to the nature of relativism. In part, this is simply because the varieties of relativism are many, and there is often confusion as to just what variety is being defended, promoted or whatever – but there are other reasons also. Perhaps the main reason, certainly a very important one, is to do with the fact that relativism often arises, not as a substantive philosophical position in its own right, but as a device used to highlight or to counter some other position. This feature of relativism is particularly important in anthropological circles, where the notion of relativism has been used to counter the threat of ethnocentrism.²³ Unfortunately, when relativism has been deployed in this negative fashion, its proponents have often been less than careful in setting out the details of relativism as a position in its own right – hence the proliferation of misunderstanding here.²⁴

A first attempt at a characterization of the general position common to various forms of relativism would be to say that it views the truth of some sentence or class of sentences as dependent on, or relative to, a particular context. I talk specifically about truth here, because it can be seen as the fundamental concept involved in any attempt at relativization. Attempts to relativize notions such as moral value, for instance, can be viewed as relativizations of the truth of statements about moral value. Thus the truth of some moral utterance is relative to the moral community in which it is uttered; the truth of a particular scientific claim might be relative to the theoretical background against which the claim is made. In the case of the sort of

conceptual relativism that Davidson considers, the truth of an utterance is relativized to a conceptual scheme or language. Yet, while the idea that the truth of a sentence might be sensitive to context does seem to be common to various relativisms, it is not an idea that, taken on its own, is particularly contentious. The truth of a sentence clearly depends on the meaning of the sentence, and the meaning is uncontroversially dependent on the context in which the sentence appears – dependent, in particular, on the language being spoken.

At this point, we may be tempted to say that what relativism adds to the notion of the context-sensitive character of truth is the idea that different contexts may be resistant to any attempt to integrate them within a single context. Indeed, it is this idea of the ‘incommensurability’ of different contexts that has usually been taken as the characteristic feature of relativism in general. Yet incommensurability has, in its own turn, been the focus for a great deal of disagreement as to what it actually involves. In Davidson’s discussion, incommensurability is taken to mean untranslatability, and this understanding of the notion has appeared in the work of many writers on the topic. But it is with the work of T. S. Kuhn that the idea first became influential, and, while it is often assumed that Kuhn takes ‘incommensurable’ to mean ‘untranslatable’, he does not in fact use the notion in this sense. As Gerald Doppelt has shown, incommensurability as explicitly addressed by Kuhn seems to be more to do with the differences and incompatibilities in the standards and problems that go to make up rival paradigms, than with a failure of translation.²⁵ Moreover, neither Kuhn nor Feyerabend (who has also been notoriously associated with the incommensurability thesis) treat incommensurability as setting an immovable barrier to understanding. Indeed, both emphasize the need for an interpretative or hermeneutic approach to the problems of incommensurability.²⁶ Yet, insofar as Davidson identifies incommensurability with untranslatability, so he conceives of relativism as a position that couples a relativization of truth to a scheme or language²⁷ with a claim that different schemes or languages may not be intertranslatable. Thus Davidson’s argument against relativism consists essentially in an argument against the idea of untranslatability. And whatever the merits of Davidson’s reading of relativism, this argument is of interest for its own sake, independently of the issue concerning incommensurability.

6.2.2 Against untranslatability

The case against untranslatability has at least two strands. The first concerns what I have called the indeterminacy of the psychological and that appears in Davidson as the indeterminacy of interpretation. It is an argument, not just against untranslatability, but also against the scheme/content distinction (and thus also against any generalized dualism of subjective and objective). Given the fact of indeterminacy, it is problematic how one can achieve any final identification of schemes or of languages. Indeed, there can be no unique answer to the question, 'What scheme is this speaker using?', for one can always interpret a speaker so that her attitudes accord with more than one scheme (this is one of the reasons why it makes no sense to claim that there is only one scheme common to all). Thus Davidson writes with respect to languages that 'it is not entirely an empirical question what language a speaker speaks; the evidence allows us some choice in languages, even to the point of allowing us to assign conflicting truth conditions to the same sentence'.²⁸ If, moreover, there is no clear way of differentiating one scheme from another – if, as Davidson says, we have found no intelligible basis on which to say that schemes are different or they are one²⁹ – then there can be no clear sense to the claim that an utterance in one language or scheme is not translatable into another. For the very question of how to identify an utterance cannot be given a unique answer. Davidson's dismantling of the idea of a scheme, and of the very idea of a language (at least under one common reading of what a language might be), is, in fact, something already presaged in my earlier discussion of the dialogic structure of interpretation itself. The notion of a language is an abstraction from actual linguistic practice; it can be viewed, like the notion of meaning or the idea of an explicit theory of interpretation, as a theoretical 'construct'.

The second strand in the argument against untranslatability derives, in Davidson's presentation, from the principle of charity. Charity expresses, in part, the connection between agreement and understanding – a connection that has the consequence that understanding is always a matter of integrating the alien into the realm of that with we are already familiar. This is so for understanding of any sort. The difficulty with the untranslatability thesis associated with relativism is that it must presuppose both that we can understand some language as a language, and that we cannot translate it. The only criterion of languagehood available to us, however, must be translatability, since only if we can translate can we show that the supposed language is indeed a language and not, for instance, a set of meaningless gargles. Only if we can translate can we do this, because only if we can translate can we exhibit the interconnectedness that

is the defining characteristic of the psychological realm of which the linguistic is a part. In effect, the force of this second strand derives from the fact that the holism of the psychological is all-encompassing – to treat a set of noises or an item of behavior as part of a language is already to accept it as open to our interpretative efforts – and consequently we can view this as a conclusion that can also be derived from the idea that succeeds the notion of charity in Davidson’s work, namely, the idea of triangulation.

This is not to say, however, that there is no sense at all to be attached to claims of untranslatability. The point I am making here is not that there can never be such a thing as a failure in translation, but rather that we cannot properly make sense of the idea of there being a priori limitations on translation (by virtue of conceptual or linguistic limitation). Yet there are, of course, practical limitations on our translational ability. Thus, translation may be frustrated by a lack of resources or information, or by inadequate technology. This is clearly illustrated by cases of our inability to translate fragments of a language. Before the discovery of the Rosetta stone the inability to translate Egyptian script was a good example of this; more recently, before the work of Michael Ventris, Linear B was similarly untranslatable. In such cases we often lack, not only a sufficiently large sample of the language to be translated, but also the living context of the language.³⁰

Untranslatability can also arise where an extremely narrow conception of what it is to translate is involved – where, for instance, translation is conceived of as a matter of exact one-to-one matchings of terms and senses. However, this latter conception of translation is a sense that would make impossible all translation whatsoever. There simply is no such thing as exact translation. The very notion of exactness in translation, if it has any useful meaning, is a notion tied to particular translational projects. What counts as exact in one circumstance may be loose in another. But there is, of course, one other acceptable sense to the notion of untranslatability. Inability to translate may well arise where the particular horizons of translation are too far apart. One such case is that of the inability to translate from one formal logical language into another where the two languages are set up in such a way that there can be no way of matching terms and predicates. Such untranslatability can arise, however, only between artificial languages whose syntax and semantics are given determinate interpretations within some larger horizon. Similar cases can be envisaged involving utterances in natural languages. Untranslatability in these cases, however, is clearly not of great concern.³¹

The argument against untranslatability clearly derives, in both strands, from the holistic character of the psychological. I take this to be the point behind Davidson's comment that 'The meaninglessness of the idea of a conceptual scheme forever beyond our grasp is due not to our inability to understand such a scheme or to our other human limitations; it is due simply to what we mean by a system of concepts'.³² It is holism that makes the notion of a conceptual scheme, and even a language, always an abstraction from actual practice, and always indeterminate. It is holism that insists on the fundamental possibility of interconnection between, not only our own beliefs, ideas and utterances, but between our own and those of other speakers. Thus the psychological realm cannot be separated into distinct and isolated fragments. Different communities, different persons even, cannot be conceived of as conceptual islands unto themselves. The psychological realm is constituted by its holism and unity, and that unity encompasses the psychological realm in general, both personally and inter-personally. Indeed, the notion of community properly extends to include all with whom we communicate – all whom we count as possible communicators.

Yet if untranslatability, in any strong form, proves to be a mistaken notion, then where does this leave the case for relativism? Davidson is undoubtedly misled in supposing in assuming that incommensurability and untranslatability amount to the same thing. So the argument against untranslatability does not immediately provide an argument against relativism in all its forms. But if it is unclear whether relativism is necessarily committed to some form of untranslatability thesis, what it clearly does involve is the idea that truth should be relativized to context or 'framework'. And this notion is no less problematic than is the very idea of a conceptual scheme as such.

6.2.3 Relativity and horizontality

In his discussion of the Quinean notion of ontological relativity, in the paper 'The Inscrutability of Reference',³³ Davidson attacks the fundamental idea of relativism – the idea of relativization itself. The idea of ontological relativity derives from the Quinean theses of the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference. The inscrutability of reference (the claim that, in translating an utterance, there is always more than one way of assigning reference to terms) is seen by Quine as a specific form of indeterminacy that affects, not so much whole sentences, as the individual terms of a language.³⁴ The

essence of the thesis is the claim that it is impossible to uniquely specify the reference of a term. Ontological relativity follows insofar as reference can only be specified against the background of some particular theory of translation, and with respect to the particular language in which that theory is given. Reference within the object language is consequently relativized to a metalanguage. The Quinean relativization of ontology (and of reference) is thus an attempt to retrieve some concept of reference in the face of the inscrutability thesis.³⁵ The problem Davidson sees, however, is that the universality of the inscrutability thesis must undermine even the attempt to relativize reference to theories of translation and languages. For reference is just as inscrutable with respect to the metalanguage as it is with respect to the object language.³⁶

Indeed, Quine himself recognizes that the attempt to relativize reference for the metalanguage opens up the possibility of a regress into a series of metalanguages.³⁷ He suggests that the solution to this difficulty is that ‘we end the regress of background languages, in discussions of reference, by acquiescing in our mother tongue and taking its words at face value’.³⁸ But taken on its own, this reply scarcely seems very illuminating. In fact Quine does have something more to offer. In talking about reference ‘what makes sense’, he says, ‘is to say not what the objects are, but how one set of objects is interpretable or reinterpretable in another’.³⁹ This appears to be the sort of solution that Davidson is thinking of when he writes that ‘I hope that my way out is what Quine had in mind all along’.⁴⁰ For Davidson’s own solution is to say that ‘All that... gets fixed by the relativization is the way we answer questions about reference, not reference itself.’⁴¹

The way in which I think that this comment needs to be understood (and on its own it is scarcely any less enigmatic than Quine’s suggestion) is to take it as a denial that reference can ever finally be fixed, even though the language that we speak may lead us to answer questions about reference in certain ways rather than others. Now this is perhaps a fairly subtle point. For relativization of reference is, in one sense, not ruled out at all. Reference, we can say, is relative in just the sense that the way we answer questions about reference – what we take the reference of terms to be depends on the language that we employ. More generally, I would say, it is relative in the sense that how we answer questions about reference depends on the beliefs, desires and other attitudes we possess, as well as our linguistic and non-linguistic dispositions

to behavior. In the terms I have developed here, we might say that how we take terms to refer depends on the horizon of our interpretative project.

The importance of this solution might not be immediately obvious. Certainly it suggests a more general argument against any form of relativity thesis – including a more explicit relativization of truth. Relativization will always face problems by virtue of the indeterminacy and the incompleteness of the psychological realm itself. Attempts to relativize truth to conceptual schemes, for instance, face the difficulty that the identification and individuation of schemes will always be open to question, because there will always be more than one correct way of interpreting those schemes, and because it will never be possible, in any case, to provide a complete specification of those schemes. Moreover, while the Davidsonian position will allow for a relativization of sorts, such relativization is not itself fixed. This is the crucial point behind the comments I quoted from Davidson and Quine above. Reference (or anything else) cannot be fixed by relativization, because even relativization cannot be fixed. As some sort of relativity is nevertheless unavoidable, so such relativity must itself allow for indeterminacy. The consequence is that relativization will always be open-ended. Relativization may fix the way we answer questions about reference’ – or about truth, meaning or whatever – but the way we answer those questions will itself still be open to interpretation. There will always be the possibility of reinterpreting the meanings attached to utterances, and the references given to terms, as the horizons of the particular interpretative project change. More generally, there will always be the possibility that such reinterpretation will result in the integration of’ or, at the very least, communication between, hitherto disparate theories, languages, cultures or whatever.

Relativization is not itself problematic, and whether it becomes so depends on how it is understood. It becomes a problematic doctrine when the context to which relativization is made is treated as fixed and determinate. But the basic motivation behind relativism lies simply in a recognition (although it is seldom expressed in this way) of the localization – the horizontality – of all our projects. The idea of incommensurability can thus be seen as an attempt to express the difficulty that arises in the transition or comparison between projects located within different horizons. This is how I take Kuhn’s comment that the ‘most fundamental’ aspect of incommensurability concerns the sense in which ‘the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds’.⁴² Kuhn’s different worlds’ are, in fact,

different horizons, and his paradigms rather like different projects.⁴³ The difficulty in the transition from one horizon to another often becomes most acute when we fail to realize that such a transition is involved⁴⁴ – when we have failed to notice the distance that must be crossed. It is then that we may be most tempted to speak of incommensurability.

Relativism becomes a problematic notion when we do not take account of the indeterminacy of relativization itself; it is also a problematic notion when it is taken to imply some sort of conceptual closure or inaccessibility. It was the latter that was at issue in the discussion of translatability. And certainly, for all the dispute about the notions of untranslatability and incommensurability, it often seems that this is an element in some forms of relativism. In this respect, relativism can, in some forms, become almost indistinguishable from dogmatism, insofar as it refuses to accept the possibility of communication and exchange. The relativism that denies this possibility is clearly ruled out by the holistic critique. Perhaps there is some limited sense to be attached to relativism in this form, however, inasmuch as it may be allowed that there are some cases where there is indeed no possibility of interaction between ourselves and others – where the realm of interpretative practice is not held in common. Such a possibility is famously argued for by Bernard Williams.⁴⁵ The case Williams seems to have in mind here is one where we are separated from others by historical distance and so can never be brought into interpretive engagement with those others – others whose epistemic and evaluative commitments may be quite different from our own. Yet even those who are historically removed from us can nevertheless be seen as part of a single extended community. In some sense, if only the sense that is required by the very possibility of our coming to know of them (and so of our having access to them by means of their texts, artifacts and so forth), they must share the same world-horizon as do we. Moreover, where there is a common continuity of tradition, there is very good reason to suppose that there exists a certain sort of trans-historical community. Indeed, since any community is a historical entity, so the basis for community must, in large part, be a matter of continuity of tradition. Such continuity of tradition, and the consequent community it helps to constitute, provides some basis for claiming that, even between temporally separate groups of people, relativism can obtain in only the very weakest of forms.

Of course, the way I have been talking about ‘community’ here (and elsewhere) suggests that the notion can be used in a number of important, but different, ways. There is that community which is the

community of all possible and actual communicants – the community that is the correlative notion to the absolute horizon of the world. There is the community that is constituted by those possible and actual communicants who share a common horizon of tradition – a common historical horizon. There is the community of possible and actual communicants who share in a set of interconnected practices. And, to complete a list that makes no claim to be exhaustive, there is also the community of actual communicants involved in current communicative interaction. Each of these communities presupposes another – the community of practices presupposes the community of tradition. Equally, each sense of community has its general and more particular applications. Thus, one may consider that a group of fishermen working on the same boat constitute a single community of practice in one sense, and yet are also part of a wider community of practice in the fishing port out of which they sail.⁴⁶ Given the holism that stands behind this discussion of community, such equivocation is indeed inevitable. Moreover horizons are always to be found embedded in further horizons, within the overall horizon of the world itself. The relativist idea that it might be impossible to achieve any sort of translation from one horizon to another simply fails to take heed of such holistic interconnection.⁴⁷

6.3 Holism and skeptical doubt

6.3.1 Skepticism and fallibilism

Relativism, in at least some forms, fails to take heed of the holism of the psychological. In Davidson's discussion, this is presented in terms of the relativist's acceptance of some form of scheme/content distinction. Much the same problem undermines the position of global skepticism also. Davidson takes skepticism as asking: 'Why couldn't all my beliefs hang together and yet be comprehensively false about the actual world?'⁴⁸ Davidson responds to this question by attempting to show that our beliefs are, for the most part, true. The emphasis here is on skepticism as attacking the truth of beliefs through its suggestion of the possibility of overall error in our beliefs.

Now, of course, skepticism has traditionally been concerned with the problems of justifying beliefs, and not merely with the possibility of error. Consequently, a more correct way of putting the traditional skeptical position is in terms of the claim that our beliefs are always, or for the most part, lacking in terms of appropriate justification. In this respect, it seems that Davidson misrepresents the

skeptical position somewhat, and that it is probably more accurate to say that the position Davidson describes is a fallibilist position rather than a skeptical one. For certainly one might accept that most of our beliefs could be wrong, and yet not accept skepticism, insofar as one might find the possibility of error compatible with the possession of adequate justification. So we can, and should, distinguish between fallibilism and skepticism.

Of course both these positions can be employed either globally, with respect to beliefs as a whole, or locally, with respect to particular beliefs or sets of beliefs. Neither local fallibilism nor local skepticism is a problem for Davidson. Particular beliefs can always, as we saw in chapter five, turn out to be false without compromising the holism of the psychological. Similarly, it is always possible to have doubts about the justification of particular beliefs. It is only the extension of the fallibilist and skeptical positions to encompass belief in general that is questionable.

While global fallibilism and global skepticism can be distinguished, it is also true that they often collapse into one. This is so if one takes adequate justification of belief to be incompatible with the possibility of error in belief. Global fallibilism entails that most of our beliefs could be false, and that most (if not all) of our beliefs cannot be justified with certainty. Therefore, if adequate justification requires certainty, most of our beliefs will not be justifiable. That most of our beliefs are not justifiable is exactly what global skepticism claims. So, on this account of the requirements of justification, the truth of global fallibilism will also imply the truth of global skepticism. Since Descartes, the assumption that adequate justification is certain justification has been fairly common and, consequently, fallibilism and skepticism have often gone together – hence Davidson’s failure to distinguish clearly between the two. The association of fallibilism with skepticism will be assumed in my discussion here, and I will generally refer only to skepticism. The Davidsonian argument will, in any case, operate as much against global fallibilism as against global skepticism. Indeed, Davidson himself argues both for the conclusion that ‘beliefs are by nature generally true’, and that our beliefs are in general justified.⁴⁹

6.3.2 The rejection of naturalized epistemology

In his discussion of skepticism, Davidson develops a response to skepticism along very similar lines to that which he develops against relativism. But he also considers and rejects another line of reply proposed by

Quine – the idea that knowledge can be given some sort of foundation or legitimation through the understanding of the causal basis of belief. This is just what Quine’s ‘naturalized epistemology’ attempts. It is, however, an attempt that Davidson argues is doomed to failure. And the reason is simple: causes are not reasons, and only reasons provide justification or legitimation. Davidson writes: ‘The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified’.⁵⁰ Davidson sees the problem here as specifically recognized by Neurath,⁵¹ and, in his discussion of Neurath, Davidson makes a comment that immediately suggests the argument he employs against the scheme/content distinction. ‘Neurath was right,’ Davidson tells us, ‘in rejecting the intelligibility of comparing sentences or beliefs with reality.’⁵² Such an idea is the basis for Davidson’s own rejection of the scheme/content distinction.

Davidson can make no sense of comparing sentences with reality, just as he can make no sense of sentences being made true by the facts or anything else. Much of the reason for this is his thoroughgoing holism about the relation between beliefs, and between beliefs, other attitudes and utterances. Such holism makes it impossible for Davidson to see beliefs as justified by anything from outside the attitudinal network. Davidson finds a version of this attitudinal holism adumbrated in Neurath’s coherentism, and in Neurath’s claim, which Davidson reiterates, that ‘We are left ... in a situation where our only evidence for a belief is other beliefs; this is not merely the logical situation, but also the pragmatic situation. And since no belief is self-certifying, none can supply a certain basis for the rest.’⁵³ Nothing that lies outside of the network of belief can provide a reason to justify any belief. The causes of beliefs cannot be their reasons. On the broader canvas provided by the thesis of psychological holism we can see that much the same point will apply – beliefs cannot be justified by anything from outside the rational realm of the psychological. (This is, indeed, a version of the ‘interpretative closure’ of the psychological discussed in chapter four – see §4.1.1.) Of course, as the last sentence of the passage just quoted above makes clear, while beliefs must find justification with respect to other beliefs and attitudes, no single belief can provide certain ground for any other belief. But I shall come back to this point later.

The claim that the causes of beliefs need not be the reasons for those beliefs does not imply that reasons cannot be causes. Davidson's claim that if reasons are to be explanatory of behavior, then they must be the causes of behavior is well known.⁵⁴ But, while reasons may be causes, not all causes are reasons. The point with respect to the justification of beliefs is that causes, considered merely as the physical causes of beliefs, cannot in themselves be reasons. That is, they cannot count as evidence for beliefs. Only other beliefs can perform this role. Indeed, in the case of action explanation an analogous situation holds it is not the physical causes of action that explain the action qua action – that rationalize the action – but rather the agent's reasons. We explain the action by fitting it into the overall psychological system of the agent. Thus, action explanation exhibits the same holism as does the interpretation of utterances; both are aspects of the same interpretative project.

Davidson suggests that Quine makes just the mistake of tending to identify causes as reasons by assimilating sensory causes to evidence. In support of this view, Davidson quotes a number of passages from Quine's work.⁵⁵ Certainly it is not difficult to find substantiation of Davidson's point in Quine's naturalization of epistemology. The very claim, which Quine himself makes, for a naturalized epistemology to be still a continuation of the epistemological enterprise is strongly suggestive of an assimilation of sensory causes to evidence. Thus, as Quine writes, 'The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one's theory of nature transcends any available evidence.'⁵⁶ Yet this is precisely why Quine's naturalistic project must fail: the aim of epistemological justification is to establish the likely truth of beliefs, but that cannot be done by 'grounding' those beliefs in the purely sensory, simply because the sensory causes of belief are not, qua causes, reasons for beliefs. In this fashion, Davidson sets up a dilemma for those who would attempt the empirical justification of beliefs – to justify beliefs by reference to their sensory causes. He argues that such a strategy can be of no help in the project of justification since either the experiences we look to will not count as evidence – because their role will be causal rather than evidential – or, if they do count as evidence, there is always the possibility that those experiences will deliver misleading or false information. Thus, in discussing the idea that we might test the truth of beliefs 'by confronting... beliefs with the tribunal of experience', Davidson writes that:

No such confrontation makes sense, for of course we can't get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happenings of which we are aware. Introducing intermediate steps or entities into the causal chain, like sensations or observations, serves only to make the epistemological problem more obvious. For if the intermediaries are merely causes, they don't justify the beliefs they cause, while if they deliver information they may be lying. The moral is obvious. Since we can't swear intermediaries to truthfulness, we should allow no intermediaries between our beliefs and their objects in the world. Of course there are causal intermediaries. What we must guard against are epistemic intermediaries.⁵⁷

In 'Epistemology Naturalized' Quine distinguishes two aspects of the epistemological task: the conceptual aspect concerned with meaning, and the doctrinal aspect concerned with truth.⁵⁸ From a Davidsonian perspective, of course, such a distinction must be thoroughly artificial – truth and meaning are intimately connected within epistemology as elsewhere. Consequently, Davidson comments that:

...theories of meaning are connected with epistemology through attempts to answer the question how one determines that a sentence is true. If knowing the meaning of a sentence (knowing how to give a correct interpretation of it) involves, or is, knowing how it could be recognized to be true, then the theory of meaning raises the same question we have been struggling with, for giving the meaning of a sentence will demand that we specify what would justify asserting it.⁵⁹

Quine is right to see epistemology as comprising both a conceptual and a doctrinal side, as comprising both questions about meaning and questions about truth, but he is wrong in seeing those two sides to epistemology as separate. Moreover, as he does separate them, so he adopts a much more foundationalist approach (in the traditional sense) than Davidson does. The conceptual task, as Quine sees it, ultimately involves providing a reductive account of the concepts of natural knowledge ('explaining the notion of body in sensory terms'⁶⁰), while naturally he views the doctrinal task (the task of answering the skeptic) as a matter of 'justifying our knowledge ... in sensory terms'.⁶¹ Neither of these approaches is acceptable to Davidson. Coming to understand our concepts and beliefs, and coming to understand whether they are true,

are both part of the same task. That task is not, however, one to be pursued by reduction or empirical justification.

Marie McGinn sees the sort of holistic epistemology that Davidson espouses as actually doing away with the conceptual task altogether, while the doctrinal task remains (at least insofar as Davidson does attempt to provide an answer to the skeptic).⁶² In fact, both tasks can be seen as remaining (in a sense), but they are no longer separate, and the way in which they are approached is completely transformed. Neither task can any longer be seen as grounding knowledge in the purely sensory (in this respect Davidson's position involves, as he points out, a rejection of empiricism⁶³). The conceptual task, that of explicating our concepts, remains, not as a reductive task, but as a matter of showing the relations between concepts and the way in which those concepts are embedded in particular horizons. The doctrinal task is carried out in a similar fashion: beliefs are justified locally in terms of their location within a particular horizon, and, insofar as a question of global justification remains, it is achieved by showing that the holistic character of the psychological already presupposes our involvement in the world and the impossibility of our global alienation from it.

In this respect, I agree with McGinn that epistemology is not brought to an end by the Davidsonian approach, but the sense in which it remains is a sense in which the theory of knowledge is transformed into, or seen as a part of, the theory of interpretation, and is thereby understood against the holistic background of the psychological. Bjørn Ramberg writes of Davidson that 'he is no epistemologist; he does not deal in that currency, though many cheques have been written in his name'.⁶⁴ Yet on my account, while Davidson certainly does not deal in the usual epistemological coin, that is largely because, to extend Ramberg's metaphor somewhat, he would reform the entire monetary system. Davidson is no epistemologist in the usual sense, because he does not offer a traditional solution to the traditional epistemological problem. Davidson deals with the skeptic, not through an analysis of knowledge and its evidential grounds, but through a consideration of the nature of interpretation. Thus, in considering Rorty's claim that he (Davidson) 'should stop trying to answer the skeptic, and tell him to get lost', Davidson comments that:

The skeptic has been told this again and again over the millennia and never seems to listen; like the philosopher he is, he wants an argument ... I did not set out [in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge'] to 'refute' the skeptic, but to give a sketch of what I thought to be a correct account of the foundations of linguistic communication and its implications for truth, belief and knowledge. If one grants the truth of this account, one can tell the skeptic to get lost.⁶⁵

Davidson's 'sketch' provides an account of the foundations of linguistic communication that shows how the notions of belief, truth and meaning are so intermeshed that skepticism is undermined. Insofar as he provides such an account, there remains a sense in which Davidson continues the epistemological project, and so could be said to move from semantics to epistemology. But the epistemology that results is an epistemology transformed – an epistemology in which there is no longer a need for skepticism to be answered – the skeptical question can no longer be put.

Given the connection between epistemology and theory of meaning one can see that, just as Davidson disagrees with Quine over the role of sensory stimulations in the interpretation or translation of utterances (Davidson, recall, abandons the Quinean notion of stimulus meaning), so this disagreement also marks a major disagreement in their approaches to the problem of epistemology. Quine's demand is for some experiential or sensory bedrock on which to anchor both the theory of meaning and the theory of knowledge. In Quine's eyes, the two are indeed intimately connected. While Davidson does not reject the Quinean association between theory of meaning and epistemology, he does reject the particular foundationalist approach that Quine adopts in both semantics and epistemology. He rejects it, not only because that approach will not work, but also because such an approach is itself conducive to skepticism. 'For clearly a person's sensory stimulations could be just as they are and yet the world outside very different.'⁶⁶ In this respect, Davidson rejects an approach to semantics and epistemology that is common to Quine – and to Michael Dummett also.⁶⁷ As Davidson comments:

Quine and Dummett agree on a basic principle, which is that whatever there is to meaning must be traced back somehow to experience, the given, or patterns of sensory stimulation, something intermediate between belief and the usual objects our beliefs are about. Once we take this step, we open the door to skepticism, for we must then allow that a great many – perhaps most – of the sentences we hold to be true may in fact be false. It is ironical. Trying to make meaning accessible has made truth inaccessible. When meaning goes epistemological in this way, truth and meaning

are necessarily divorced. One can, of course, arrange a shotgun wedding by redefining truth as what we are justified in asserting. But this does not marry the original mates.⁶⁸

Once again we can see how Davidson's paramount concern is to preserve the all-important pairing of truth and meaning, and it is, of course, just that pairing which is here under threat. Davidson has seen that the failure of the Quinean approach is representative of the failure of the foundationalist, empiricist approach as such. Any attempt to found knowledge on the senses must fail. It must fail because what gives rise to skepticism, and the epistemological problem, is just the distinction between knowledge and the claimed sensory basis of knowledge. This point is also recognized by Barry Stroud: 'I... echo Kant's idea that a completely general distinction between everything we get through the senses, on the one hand, and what is or is not true of the external world, on the other, would cut us off forever from knowledge of the world around us'.⁶⁹ Here we can see another version of that dichotomy which Davidson describes and rejects under the heading of the 'third dogma' – the dogma of the distinction between scheme and content – and that is but a specific instance of the more general 'myth' of the subjective.

6.3.3 Arguments against skepticism

Davidson's own attempt at answering the skeptic proceeds by applying the lessons of radical interpretation directly to epistemology. Epistemology concerns beliefs and their truth, and, for Davidson, this is also part of the subject matter of radical interpretation. It is, indeed, in radical interpretation that the connections between belief, meaning and truth are made perspicuous. The Davidsonian argument against skepticism, advanced in number of papers from 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' (perhaps the paper that offers his fullest treatment of the issue, yet also a paper that Davidson has since come to view as problematic, and not for its misleading title) to 'Three Varieties of Knowledge' (one of Davidson's clearest and most succinct expressions of his core views), thus proceeds on the basis of the interpretative considerations developed in the context of radical interpretation. In essence, the strategy is to turn the lessons of radical interpretation on ourselves: if our own utterances and attitudes are to be made sense of – if they are indeed to have content as utterances and attitudes – then, by the principle of charity, we must take most of our beliefs to be true.

In 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' Davidson presents his argument as having two parts:

First I urge that a correct understanding of the speech, desires, intentions and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true. Then I go on to claim that anyone with thoughts, and so in particular anyone who wonders whether he has any reason to suppose he is generally right about the nature of his environment, must know what a belief is, and how in general beliefs are to be detected and interpreted. These being perfectly general facts we cannot fail to use when we communicate with others there is a pretty strong sense in which we can be said to know that there is a presumption in favor of the overall truthfulness of anyone's beliefs, including our own.⁷⁰

These two parts to the argument seem to reflect the differing approaches that Davidson presents in the two earliest papers in which the problem of skepticism is addressed (albeit briefly), 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics' and 'Thought and Talk'. It should be evident, however, just how much the argument against the skeptic consists in simply a redeployment of familiar arguments concerning interpretative holism, and the associated principle of charity. Once we recognize the interlocking of meaning, belief and truth, we must recognize that 'belief is in its nature veridical'.⁷¹ This is the substance of the Davidsonian 'coherence' theory of knowledge. The veridicality of belief is, in fact, already presupposed in the possibility of interpretation and understanding.

Of course, one might object that interpretation surely requires only agreement and not truth – might it not be possible for interpreters to understand one another 'on the basis of shared but erroneous beliefs'?⁷² – and there is no doubt that this has become a commonly repeated objection, often taken to be conclusive, to the Davidsonian position.⁷³ Davidson explicitly considers this possibility, and in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' he proposes a solution that looks to the situation of an 'omniscient interpreter' in interpreting the utterances of a fallible (and perhaps mistaken) speaker. This is a strategy that Davidson had already suggested in 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics':

We do not need to be omniscient to interpret, but there is nothing absurd in the idea of an omniscient interpreter; he attributes beliefs to others, and interprets their speech on the basis of his own beliefs, just as the rest of us do. Since he does this as the rest of us do, he perforce finds as much agreement as is needed to make sense of his attributions and interpretations; and in this case, of course, what is agreed is by hypothesis true. But now it is plain why massive error

about the world is simply unintelligible, for to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible.⁷⁴

Davidson's use of the idea of omniscience here is intended simply to demonstrate the interconnected character of belief, truth and meaning. Since even the hypothetical omniscient interpreter is constrained by the holism that requires agreement in order to interpret, so to suppose that most of our beliefs might be false is to suppose that one can interpret without reference to what is true. But that, claims Davidson, is impossible.

One thing that should be noticed here is that this argument is not an argument for holism, but one that relies on holism as a premise, and that attempts to show that the agreement holism requires cannot be merely an agreement based on error. But the argument in this form has generated a good deal of discussion – most of it unfavorable⁷⁵ and there seems little doubt that it is simply misleading to a great many readers. Moreover, one suspects that there may, in fact, be a certain incoherence in the idea of omniscience that Davidson employs here – even though it is only employed heuristically. It is not that omniscience, as Davidson intends it, rules out the need for interpretation. For Davidson's 'omniscient interpreter' is omniscient only 'about the world, and about what does and would cause a speaker to assent to any sentence in his (potentially unlimited) repertoire'.⁷⁶ It is not, therefore, an omniscience that extends to include prior knowledge of speakers' attitudes or the meanings of their words.⁷⁷ (There is, indeed, nothing – no fact – to be omniscient about here.) Yet it is not at all clear what it would mean to be in possession of all that there is to know about the world. The dynamism and indeterminacy of the psychological casts doubt on such a notion, as does my own development of the world as a horizontal concept.⁷⁸

The introduction of a notion that seems likely to be incoherent on Davidson's own account may simply serve to provide an additional source of obscurity here. Yet, whatever the merits of Davidson's use of the notion of omniscience, it is by no means clear that it is needed to establish the desired conclusion. Much of the force of the argument for the truth of our beliefs, as it derives from a consideration of the nature of interpretation, consists in the recognition of the inseparability of 'the world' or the speaker's environment or 'truth' from the speaker's utterances and beliefs. The notion of a speaker who is massively

mistaken is the notion of a world radically divorced from the beliefs and utterances of a particular speaker. Such separation is just what Davidson maintains is unintelligible, and he can maintain this without any recourse to the notion of an 'omniscient interpreter', since this is just what lies behind the rejection of the scheme/content distinction. Thus Davidson's later presentations of the argument – in, for instance, 'Empirical Content' and 'Three Varieties of Knowledge' – make no reference to this idea at all. Not from the interpreter's point of view, then, 'is there any way he [the interpreter] can discover the speaker to be largely wrong about the world. For he interprets sentences held true (which is not to be distinguished from attributing beliefs) according to the events and objects in the outside world that cause the sentence to be held true.'⁷⁹ Here there is no reference, nor any need to make reference, to the possibly misleading, and certainly contentious, idea of omniscience.

The real nature of Davidson's position is made clearer with the second part of the argument in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge': 'In order to doubt or wonder about the provenance of his beliefs an agent must know what belief is. This brings with it the concept of objective truth, for the notion of a belief is the notion of a state that may or may not jibe with reality. But beliefs are also identified, directly and indirectly, by their causes.'⁸⁰ Being able to identify, and hence attribute, beliefs, means being able to identify a majority of true beliefs within a network of the speaker's attitudes. This is the nature of belief. Beliefs, along with other attitudes, form a holistic system. Such is the thesis of attitudinal holism. Failure to be able to identify beliefs in this way would mean a failure to find any reason to suppose that there were any beliefs present in the first place. Here we are back, once more, with the argument against untranslatability. Thus Davidson claims that, as beliefs are in their nature veridical, all beliefs are justified in this sense. This leaves open, as an empirical question, the issue of whether any particular belief' or set of beliefs, are justified in some particular context. But what is closed off is the question as to whether all our beliefs might be unjustified and unjustifiable. The point here is analogous to that which I made in discussing charity and the possibility of error on the part of those we interpret: local error is admissible, so long as global truth is preserved. If this is so in the case of those we interpret, it must also be the case with respect to ourselves, at least so long as we are to be interpreted as having beliefs and using a language.

The impossibility of justifying beliefs by looking to the non-epistemic causes of belief seems to leave open only one course for justification to take. Only beliefs can provide a reason for other beliefs.

Events in the world provide no reason to hold a particular belief except insofar as they cause some belief to be held which may itself provide evidence for further beliefs. ‘And then it is the belief that is properly called the evidence, not the event.’⁸¹ And then it is also the belief’ rather than the event, that is properly called the reason. This may seem to force us towards some sort of coherence theory of knowledge – a theory whereby beliefs are warranted as knowledge because of their relationship to other beliefs. Such coherence theories are often associated with relativism. However, as Davidson himself points out, no single belief can provide a certain basis for any other belief, and, indeed, there is always the possibility that we have got some of our beliefs quite wrong. So, if there are elements of a coherence theory of knowledge here, that must be read against the background of a commitment to indeterminacy, and to a wide-ranging holism. In fact, it is almost certainly a mistake to view Davidson’s position as implying a commitment to a coherence theory of knowledge, just as it is also mistaken to associate such coherentism with psychological holism in general.

Of course, if Davidson were actually committed to a coherence theory of knowledge, then one might suppose that this would also imply his commitment to a coherence theory of evidence and of truth. A coherence theory of knowledge will certainly imply a coherence theory of truth, since knowledge is of what is true, while the justification of beliefs necessary for true belief to count as knowledge will have to be in terms of the coherence of those beliefs with other beliefs. It might be thought that, at one time, at least, Davidson was explicitly committed to a coherence theory of truth and knowledge – perhaps only by virtue of the title ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’. Admittedly, Davidson has sometimes seemed to espouse a coherence approach, though his commitment has seldom been clear cut – at least so far as the content of his writings, if not their titles, has been concerned. However, in the ‘Afterthoughts’ to ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’,⁸² as well as in his Dewey Lectures (‘The Structure and Content of Truth’),⁸³ Davidson explicitly disavows any apparent commitment to a coherence theory of truth on his part, and, thereby, implicitly also disavows any commitment to a coherence theory of knowledge.

As I will argue more fully in chapter seven (§7.2.3), it would be a mistake to treat the Davidsonian position as committed to a coherence account of truth (though this is not to say that there are not elements of coherentism in Davidsonian holism). Nevertheless, the issue of coherence does raise an important

question about the Davidsonian argument against skepticism. The traditional objection to coherence theories of truth has been that they are not really theories of truth at all, but only theories of evidence: such theories really show, not that truth is coherence, but that the only way we can decide on truth is via coherence (coherence provides evidence in favor of truth), and this does not prove that the beliefs in question are true. It might well be objected that there is a similar problem with Davidson's position here (problem very similar to the problem to which Davidson intends the omniscient interpreter argument to be a solution). Thus it might be claimed that any anti-skeptical force that the Davidsonian argument may have derives solely from a confusion between the idea that we must presuppose the truth of our beliefs and the fact of those beliefs being true. Presupposing that beliefs are true is not the same as those beliefs being true. Now I am very strongly of the view that this objection to the Davidsonian position is mistaken, but I think that the original Davidsonian presentations of that position do not always make clear why the objection is mistaken. Here, in fact, we need to set the original Davidsonian argument within the broader framework provided by the account of psychological holism. Indeed, the argument against skepticism is already presupposed within that account – psychological holism thus leaves no room for setting up the possibility envisaged by global skepticism.

6.3.4 Holism, externalism and verificationism

In arguing against skepticism, Davidson seems to attempt to marry together two different strategies by which the overall truth of beliefs is to be maintained. The first is explicitly holistic, and looks to justify beliefs against a background of other beliefs. Thus Marie McGinn writes of Davidson's argument in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' that what it suggests is that 'It is only through the commitment to an unquestioned background of beliefs that it is possible to mean, and therefore to judge, doubt, confirm, disconfirm, etc., anything at all.'⁸⁴ Such a strategy has clear Wittgensteinian echoes.⁸⁵ The second strategy, while it can also be read holistically, looks to causal connections between beliefs and objects in the world. This latter strategy is captured in the Davidsonian advice that 'we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. And what we, as interpreters, must take them to be is what in fact they are.'⁸⁶ It is this latter strategy that often goes under

the name of 'externalism'.⁸⁷ As they appear in Davidson the relation between these two strategies is not always clear.⁸⁸ In fact, the two strategies can be viewed as both expressions of the same underlying holism – both derive from the holism of the psychological and its intentional-horizonal structure.

Indeed, the argument against skepticism was already presaged in earlier discussions of the nature of psychological unity, and the correlate of that unity in the unity of the world-horizon. The way in which the two Davidsonian strategies arise is made very clear when we look at those strategies in relation to the actual structure of the psychological. Psychological unity is always an intentional-horizonal unity – a unity expressed always in terms of particular horizonal structures. Such structures are not purely subjective structures, but embody the holistic relation between individuals, and the world and community in which those individuals are located. The relation at issue here is constituted in different ways in different cases. That the horizonal structure is not a purely subjective structure is clearest when we remember that the intentional-horizonal structure is also a projective structure. It is within the holistic structure of our projects that we become involved with things, with other persons and with the world. The world always presents itself within such projects. Externalism is not a premise of this account, but an idea that can be deduced from it. It is a derivative notion – it expresses one feature of the intentional-horizonal structure of the project in abstraction from others. In part, it could be viewed as an expression of the intentionality of that structure, but it also expresses the way in which projects encompass both the individual, the larger interpretive-intersubjective context and the objects and events with which the interpreter is involved. In this respect, Davidson's development of the notion of triangulation, most clearly expressed in 'Three Varieties of Knowledge', is particularly illuminating since it presents just such a structure of interpreter, interlocutor and object – it thus can be viewed as illustrating the way in which externalism and holism are indeed tied together. The focus on externalism gives particular emphasis to the non-subjective character of our projective involvement with the world. And, if externalism derives from the intentionality of projects, then in emphasizing the way in which beliefs are always part of a wider background of belief, we are doing no more than pointing towards the horizonal character of our projects. Only within such horizons can particular projects be constituted. Such horizons, and ultimately the world-horizon, could be said to constitute the foundations for knowledge. In this respect the holistic account is foundationalist, but the foundations are themselves either shifting or empty.⁸⁹

The claim that belief is always to be located against a wider horizon is clearly tied to holism. Externalism too, as it arises here, must be understood as an expression of holism. It is possible, however, to adopt an externalist strategy in interpretation that is largely independent of any broader holism. Such a strategy will lead to difficulties. This can be illustrated by consideration of a particular skeptical example that has now become part of many contemporary philosophers' stock-in-trade – the example of the envatted brain (an example that took on a new lease of life in the popular science-fiction film 'The Matrix'). This is essentially an updated version of the Cartesian evil demon story. A brain is separated from its usual bodily accoutrements, and maintained, alive, in a large fluid-filled vat in a laboratory. The brain's nerve-endings are artificially stimulated to induce a simulation of life in the outside world, and this is, indeed, the only life the brain has ever had. The example is extremely bizarre (indeed, if the account of holism I have presented here is correct, then it is a highly implausible example on a priori grounds alone), and almost certainly a physical impossibility. But, that aside, how would we go about translating any of the utterances of such a brain (assuming it could, in fact, make utterances) and how would we identify its beliefs? According to Richard Rorty, the Davidsonian account says that 'the best way to translate the discourse of a brain which has always lived in a vat will be as referring to the vat-cum-computer environment the brain is actually in'.⁹⁰ So, no matter what stimulations the brain is given, the utterances and beliefs of that brain will never refer to anything other than the immediate physical environment in which the brain is located.

There is no doubt that the Davidsonian account will require that we look to the objects that are the actual causes of belief in trying to interpret, but we need to be careful about exactly how we take things from there. The interpretative strategy Rorty suggests is, in fact, likely to lead to some difficulties. To begin with, a problem may arise in dealing with possible dissent on the part of the envatted brain from translations of its utterances that take the brain to be talking about the vat-computer environment rather than a world of trees, grass and people. Such dissent, if it arises, cannot be ignored – holism requires that it be taken account of.⁹¹ But there is a more serious difficulty. If the envatted brain ought to be interpreted as speaking only about the vat-computer environment, and never about the 'real' world, then the language spoken by that brain cannot be fully intertranslatable with those languages that can be used to speak about the 'real' world. Such a failure of translatability appears to be in conflict with the Davidsonian argument against the untranslatability of natural languages. Moreover, since we cannot be sure that we ourselves are

not brains in vats, we cannot be sure that our own language is not conceptually limited in the way that an envatted brain's language would be. Indeed, since we cannot know whether or not we ourselves are envatted brains, we cannot, on this account, know what our own words mean or even what we believe.

In fact just this sort of situation is described by Davidson himself as a possible consequence of some forms of externalism. Thus he writes that:

Those who accept the thesis that the contents of propositional attitudes are partly identified in terms of external factors seem to have a problem similar to the problem of the skeptic who finds we may be altogether mistaken about the 'outside' world. In the present case, ordinary skepticism of the senses is avoided by supposing the world itself more or less correctly determines the contents of thoughts about the world. But skepticism is not defeated; it is only displaced onto knowledge of our own minds. Our ordinary beliefs about the external world are (on this view) directed onto the world, but we don't know what we believe.⁹²

At this point, the problem of skepticism becomes entwined with the problem I discussed earlier as the problem of first-person authority (§4.1.2). That Davidson himself recognizes a problem here suggests that we should indeed be very careful in our reading of Davidson's position.⁹³ In fact, Davidsonian externalism must be viewed, as I suggested above, in conjunction with Davidsonian holism, and Davidson's own comments on how externalism should be understood seem to lend support to such a view.⁹⁴

Externalism, when understood as a holistic thesis, need not result in an impoverishment of our conceptual and linguistic resources, nor need it undermine our ability to know what we mean and believe. Yet externalism, in conjunction with the idea that belief must always be seen against a wider horizon, does undermine the possibility of skepticism. Such holistic considerations make the very attempt to provide a coherent formulation of the skeptical position difficult. Indeed, skepticism depends on representing our involvement with the world in a way that ignores holism, that treats our involvement with the world as primarily theoretical, and that treats our involvement as a relation between subjectivity and objectivity. Skepticism, in fact, depends on abstracting a theoretical structure of belief from the psychological in general, and then setting this in contrast with another abstraction, in the form of a particular conception of 'the world'. But, of course, our primary involvement with the world is not theoretical, and neither the psychological realm in general nor the world can be given any determination other than as they are

manifest in particular projective structures. Thus the global contrast between belief and world that is assumed by skepticism – a contrast that is another reflection of the dualism of subjective and objective – cannot be achieved.⁹⁵

It would be a mistake to suppose that the skeptical attempt to achieve a global contrast of belief and world could, nevertheless, be legitimated by appeal to the notion of the world-horizon as that against which our beliefs might be set. The horizontal unity of the world is not the notion of a determinate unity at all. It is rather the notion of a unity that encompasses all possible projects, and which is only articulated through the dialogue of our ongoing involvement with things, and with other persons, within our shifting horizons. It is a notion that is prior to any particular project, and that is presupposed by the possibility of any such project. Only against the background of the world-horizon is the ongoing movement of understanding – of expectation and frustration, of projection and modification – possible. ‘The world comes not afterward, but beforehand’, says Heidegger, and he goes on ‘The world as already unveiled in advance is such that we do not in fact specifically occupy ourselves with it, but instead it is so self-evident, so much a matter of course, that we are completely oblivious of it. World is that which is already previously unveiled and from which we return to the beings with which we have to do and among which we dwell.’⁹⁶ Even the skeptic is oblivious to the world. The paradox of skepticism is thus that the skeptic must assume the world-horizon while at the same time casting doubt on the possibility of access to the world.

At this point there is, however, a particular objection with which we must deal. For it will almost certainly be claimed that the idea that one cannot separate the psychological from the world in which it is located, and the associated notion that one cannot distinguish between presupposition and reality at the level of the world-horizon (a point also raised at §4.3.2), is nothing more than the embodiment of a certain sort of verificationism in that it seems to conflate the idea that there is a common world with the idea that we must believe that there is such a world.⁹⁷ Such verificationism has also been associated, by Barry Stroud and others,⁹⁸ with transcendental arguments. And Davidson has himself referred to his argument against conceptual relativism (and implicitly to the argument against skepticism) as a ‘transcendental argument’,⁹⁹ while many readers of Davidson have taken his arguments against both relativism and skepticism in the same way.¹⁰⁰

The issue of the transcendental status of Davidson's position is a complex one, and whether Davidson's position is considered transcendental depends very much on how broadly the notion of the transcendental is to be understood. There is certainly reason to treat Davidson's position as transcendental in some respects – particularly insofar as it can be seen as an attempt to ground knowledge and discourse in a unitary horizon.¹⁰¹ This is not, however, an issue that I intend to discuss in detail here (I have, however, touched on it elsewhere¹⁰²). Of more serious and immediate concern is the charge of verificationism, for that charge seems to depend on a misunderstanding of the Davidsonian position – it may also involve a misunderstanding of the nature of the transcendental, although this is not an issue I intend to pursue here.

The collapse of the distinction between presupposition and reality with respect to the world-horizon is not based on some verificationist premise. It is simply that the holism of the psychological, as manifest in the structure of interpretation, implies the impossibility of separating questions about what is believed from questions about what is true, from questions about what is known. It is for this reason that we can say that most of our beliefs must be true or, at least, cannot globally be doubted – and such doubt is implicit in the idea of a distinction between belief in the existence of a common world and the existence of such a world. We cannot make coherent the notion of a global separation of truth from belief. And this means that the meaningfulness of statements and beliefs is dependent on our knowledge of a vast body of truths. This may, however, elicit the response that such a reply merely illustrates the verificationism inherent in holism. For the claim that meaningfulness is dependent on some background of known truths seems very close to Stroud's characterization of verificationism as the claim that 'the meaning of a statement ... [has] to be determined by what we can know'.¹⁰³

Yet the characterization of verificationism in terms just of the dependence of meaningfulness on knowledge, while it may capture something of the spirit of verificationism, is surely too broad.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, if the holistic account I have developed here is verificationist, then it involves a very unusual version of verificationism. For on this account, and even on a more conventional Davidsonian account, the emphasis on global truth means that there is no requirement that any particular belief, if it is to be meaningful, must be capable of being known to be true or false. The holistic requirement is always a global, rather than a local, one and so holism cannot be verificationist at the level of the meaningfulness of specific statements. But it is hard to see how it can be verificationist at the global level either. Perhaps one

could argue that the verificationism at this level consists in the idea that the truth or falsity of particular beliefs is made to depend on being able to determine or to verify the truth of certain background beliefs. But Davidson does not hold this position, nor does it follow from psychological holism. There is no question of determining, or verifying, the truth of beliefs in order for other beliefs to be true or false. It is simply that most beliefs must be true, and be held to be true, if some beliefs are to be false. This does not mean that we must have verified the truth of most of our beliefs, for verification is something that can only be done with respect to specific beliefs. It is rather that overall truth, which I have expressed in terms of the assumption of the world-horizon, is simply a requirement of the possibility of interpretation, communication and verification itself.

Such considerations suggest that the objection that the Davidsonian position is verificationist simply rests on too crude an understanding of what that position involves.¹⁰⁵ Given the holism of the psychological, there is simply no room, at the global level, to distinguish between the absolute horizon of the world and any other more fundamental concept of 'the world'. Nor is there any room to separate the concept of truth as it inheres in the horizons of our discourse from any other more fundamental notion of truth. Since both truth and world are horizontal notions, so there are no horizons one could appeal to in attempting to distinguish between the world-horizon and the world, or between the assumption of overall truth and truth itself. This is not to invoke verificationism, but merely to say something about the nature of the psychological and the holism that characterizes it.¹⁰⁶

I have, in much of the discussion so far, been continuing to use the Davidsonian turn of phrase according to which the debate with the skeptic is about the overall truth of our beliefs. In this respect, I have been assuming the association between global skepticism and global fallibilism. But I have also been assuming that such talk is, in fact, acceptable. And it is surely questionable whether it is. Indeed, if we cannot really treat the psychological realm in general, or even of particular horizons, as constituted primarily in terms of beliefs, and, since it is beliefs (or, perhaps, the sentences that express them) that have the property of being true or false, then it is surely mistaken to talk of the overall truth of beliefs or an assumption of global truth. If we are to talk of 'overall' truth, then what must be recognized is that the notion of truth being referred to is, as I suggested earlier, a horizontal notion. In that case, it cannot be conceived as restricted to individual propositions alone, but must, in a certain sense, inhere more generally

in the psychological as a whole – that is, in the very structure of attitude and behavior, and of our involvement with the world. This suggests how much the charge of verificationism must depend on either a misreading of the position here, or on an unusual construal of that in which verificationism consists. It also suggests an equivocity in the notion of truth analogous to the equivocity which I have already suggested attaches to the notion of ‘world’ itself. What is presaged here is a transformation in the notion of truth itself. This, however, is something that I will leave, for the moment, to discuss at greater length in the next chapter.

7 Truth and the world

In the previous chapter, we saw how the holistic conception of the psychological undermines some standard epistemological positions, in particular, certain versions of relativism and skepticism. Such positions are problematic inasmuch as they embody a dualistic conception of the relation between mind and world, between subjective and objective. Whereas in the previous chapter the focus was on questions of justification and knowledge, in this chapter, the focus will move to the problem of realism and the nature of truth itself. Part of my aim here will be to locate Davidson with respect to the dispute between realism and anti-realism. Although this dispute is now somewhat less at the centre of discussion than it was in the 1980s,¹ it remains interesting not merely inasmuch as it demonstrates the way in which Davidson's position has often given rise to quite divergent readings (while Dummett has taken Davidson as the archetypal realist, and Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinoza have viewed him as what they term a 'deflationary realist', Thomas Nagel, David Papineau and Frederick Stoutland have all presented him as opposed to realism), but also because a commitment to a certain basic, almost commonsensical 'realism' does seem to play an important role in Davidson's thinking. The discussion of realism and anti-realism is, however, no more than the preliminary to the discussion of truth in which this chapter culminates. Truth is, indeed, one of the fundamental notions in my development of Davidsonian holism, as it is a fundamental notion in Davidson's own development of his thinking. The centrality of truth was already suggested by earlier discussions – particularly the discussions of charity in chapter five. In the terms advanced here, the notion of truth is, in fact, closely tied to the notion of the horizontal unity of the psychological and the idea of the world-horizon itself. Those ideas will be explored further in this final chapter.

7.1 Skepticism, realism and anti-realism

Global skepticism, on the holistic approach I have so far advanced, is a position that cannot be made intelligible. There is no possibility of a speaker being mostly wrong in her beliefs about the world; truth always inheres in our beliefs in general. Global epistemological skepticism has, however, been associated with the position known as 'realism'. 'Realism' is a label that can be put to quite general use, but in recent

philosophy the term has acquired a fairly specific (if not always unambiguous) usage in relation to a small cluster of issues concerning questions about the nature of truth, and the relation between the world and our utterances, beliefs and theories about the world. Michael Devitt has argued for what he sees as a straightforward and simple definition of realism as essentially the view that ‘Common-sense physical entities exist independently of the mind.’² Often (though not by Devitt³) such realism has been taken as identical with what Hilary Putnam has famously called ‘metaphysical’ or ‘external’ realism and of which he writes that: ‘[on this view] the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.’⁴ Metaphysical realism, on Putnam’s account, comprises three distinct (though perhaps not logically independent) theses: an independence thesis according to which the existence of the world or the objects that make up the world is independent of anything mental; a uniqueness thesis that states that there is one, and only one, true and complete description of the world; and a thesis about truth that sees truth as a matter of correspondence between language and the world. The first of these characteristics – the independence thesis – seems to be identical with the idea of the world (or the ‘Commonsense physical entities’ within it) as existing ‘independently of the mind’ that is so central to Devitt’s account of realism.⁵

In his book The View from Nowhere, Thomas Nagel presents a similar account of ‘realism’ as the view that ‘the world is in a strong sense independent of our possible representations, and may well extend beyond them’.⁶ Nagel also claims explicitly, however, that realism is intimately connected with skepticism, since it is what underlies skepticism. According to Nagel ‘realism makes skepticism intelligible’,⁷ for if we accept the realist claim that the world is independent of our ways of conceiving or representing it, and may indeed be beyond our capacity to so conceive or represent, it follows that the world may be other than as we actually do conceive or represent it. If skepticism is understood to consist in the claim that most or all of our beliefs about the world might be false, then it seems that skepticism follows from realism.⁸ In rejecting skepticism on holistic grounds we thus seem to be committed to a rejection of realism also – at least in the form Nagel describes.

The connection between realism and skepticism is not, however, quite so straightforward. For epistemological skepticism has, as we saw earlier (§6.3.1), traditionally questioned the possibility of our

being able to properly justify our beliefs. Skepticism has raised doubts, not so much about the truth of our beliefs, as about our claims to know. But in that case the connection between realism and skepticism will be rather less clear than it may have at first appeared. For nothing about the possibility of justifying our beliefs follows from the claim that the world is independent of how we conceive or represent it. Yet, of course, Nagel's claim is not that realism implies skepticism, but simply that realism makes skepticism 'intelligible', and certainly it is only if the world is independent of belief, as the realist claims, that skepticism can be a possibility. If it is assumed that the world is not independent of our ways of conceiving it, but is indeed dependent on those ways of conceiving, then skepticism will not be a plausible position. Indeed, one of the traditional strategies of arguing against the skeptic has been to argue for some such dependence of world on mind. Insofar as global fallibilism is an essential step on the path towards global skepticism, and as realism provides the basis for global fallibilism, so realism is necessary, though not sufficient, for the possibility of skepticism. In this sense, it seems that we could say that realism underlies skepticism.

The association between realism, particularly metaphysical realism, and skepticism is something that Davidson explicitly notes. He seems, however, to treat realism as more than just a presupposition of skepticism – he treats it as virtually identical with skepticism. In this respect he takes global skepticism and global fallibilism to be one and the same. The position Putnam calls metaphysical realism is, he says, 'skepticism in one of its traditional garbs. It asks: Why couldn't all my beliefs hang together and yet be comprehensively false about the actual world?'⁹ Davidson argues, of course, that such global skepticism (or global fallibilism) is ruled out in virtue of the close connections that must obtain between the concepts of belief and truth. Thus the notion of objectivity is built into the Davidsonian concept of belief itself – 'belief is in its nature veridical' (see §6.3).

Davidson's rejection of skepticism, and the fallibilism on which it relies, leads him also to reject metaphysical realism precisely because of the way it separates belief from truth. Thus, in the process of once laying claim to the title of 'realist' for himself (a title he would now rather relinquish), he writes: 'my realism is certainly not Putnam's metaphysical realism, for it is characterized by being "radically non-epistemic", which implies that all our best researched and established thoughts and theories may be false. I think that the interdependence of meaning and belief requires only that each of our beliefs may be false.'¹⁰

Moreover, while Davidson does not himself note the point, metaphysical realism involves a further idea that can make no sense on the Davidsonian account (or on the thoroughly holistic account I have developed here) – the idea of a unique, true and complete description of the world. Such a notion does not accord with the incomplete and indeterminate character of all interpretative activity. Indeed, the idea of the world as horizon precludes the possibility of treating the world or ‘reality’ – conceived as a totality – as an object of description. It is the ground for such description rather than its object.

As Davidsonian holism leads to the rejection of global skepticism, and of metaphysical realism along with it, so such holism might be seen as leading to some form of anti-realism or even idealism. For, of course, the sort of arguments against skepticism that follow from Davidsonian holism, arguments Davidson himself deploys, may well be thought to have affinities with certain idealist arguments against skepticism. Moreover, if Davidson’s views can indeed be taken in the direction of philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger, as I have attempted here, then surely this can serve only to reinforce those idealist or anti-realist tendencies. Thomas Nagel certainly views the Davidsonian position as representative of a form of idealism. The idealism Nagel attributes to Davidson is not, however, idealism of a Berkeleyan or Hegelian cut, and he makes no allusions to Husserl. Instead he claims that the Davidsonian position embodies a linguistic version of the view that ‘what there is must be possibly conceivable by us, or possibly something for which we could have evidence’.¹¹

Interestingly, Nagel looks to Davidson’s anti-relativistic arguments in the paper ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, rather than to his anti-fallibilist or anti-skeptical position, as ground for his charge that Davidson is an idealist. As we saw earlier (§6.2.2), Davidson rejects the possibility of there being a set of attitudes or utterances so foreign to us that we could not understand them. Nagel’s claim is that what Davidson effectively denies here is the possibility that there may be aspects of the world that go beyond what we ourselves can come to know or comprehend. Yet Nagel also claims that it is self-evidently the case that there are things that lie outside of our own ability to speak or think. There is no doubt that Davidson’s position appears to be non-realist on Nagel’s account of realism, simply in virtue of its apparent violation of Nagel’s version of the independence requirement, glossed by Nagel as the requirement that ‘the world extends beyond the reach of our minds’.¹² If the world did extend in such a way, then that would imply that there was some fact (or facts) about the world that could not be understood by us or stated in our

language. Perhaps there might even be creatures with different sensory or intellectual abilities who could comprehend and state those facts. In the latter case the language of those creatures would be partially or perhaps completely opaque to us.

Nagel's 'idealist' reading of Davidson is echoed by David Papineau, who takes Davidson to be representative of a strong form of anti-realism. In fact, Papineau defines realism and anti-realism primarily in terms of their respective attitudes towards skepticism,¹³ and he terms Davidsonian anti-realism an 'anti-realism of belief'. Such anti-realism is characterized by Papineau as consisting in the strong claim that 'almost all human beliefs cannot help but fit reality and are therefore in no need of justification'.¹⁴ This claim is, of course, altogether too strong. Davidson does not deny the need to justify beliefs. Instead, he denies the need for any ultimate or final justification of beliefs. Particular beliefs or sets of beliefs are always open to the demand for justification, and often that demand can be satisfied. Beliefs are more or less justified with respect to other beliefs. What cannot, and need not, be satisfied is any demand to justify our beliefs in general or to provide a justification for all our beliefs. Such a demand need not be met, because, as we have already seen, beliefs are constituted by their relations with other beliefs – and the background of belief must be a background of generally true belief. Our beliefs, in general, do not require justification because the background of belief must itself be generally true if particular beliefs are to be true or false. The idea that truth inheres necessarily in belief as a whole, even though almost any particular beliefs can be false, suggests that the notion of truth that is being employed in talk of belief in general is somewhat unusual. This is a point I noted earlier (§6.3.4). Davidson does, in this respect, employ the notion of truth in a very particular and even somewhat idiosyncratic fashion – although this is not something that he makes explicit – and this is indicative both of the central significance of the notion of truth here and of the need for a fuller articulation of that notion.

While Papineau's claim about justification and belief is, indeed, too strong, it might nevertheless be thought that the idea that beliefs in general need no justification does provide some support for Papineau's anti-realist reading of Davidson on belief. It might seem, as Papineau suggests, that Davidson is arguing for some guaranteed a priori 'fit' between beliefs and the world. This reading is mistaken, however, if only because Davidson rejects the idea of the relationship between beliefs and the world (or between sentences and the world) as one of 'fit' at all. This point will arise again when we look at Davidson's views

on truth. Yet it is a point that is clear enough from Davidson's holistic conception of the relations between belief, meaning and the rest, and from the account of psychological holism that has been set out in preceding chapters. There can be no 'fit' between beliefs and the world, because the world is the overarching horizon within which all beliefs are to be located. Indeed, if there is no world such that beliefs could be contrasted with it, neither is there any way that a separate realm of 'belief' can be distinguished in order to be set against the realm of objects and events that is the world. Allusion has already been made to one of the reasons for this: beliefs are located within particular horizons and particular projects; within such horizons they are interconnected with other beliefs, as well as with a range of attitudes, moods, desires, fears and so forth; and while particular beliefs can be distinguished from particular desires, fears, hopes or whatever (though only within the limits imposed by indeterminacy), it will not be possible to separate out beliefs, as a whole, from the psychological realm in general; since any such process of abstraction can only apply within particular horizons, and since it must remain always an abstraction, so there are no 'beliefs' that can, in their entirety, be separated from the world, in its entirety, in order that a contrast be drawn between them.

This argument is paralleled, as we have seen already, by an argument from the very methodology of interpretation. In interpreting a speaker, beliefs and utterances are identified, at least in the first instance, in relation to the objects and events in the speaker's environment, that is, in relation to the world in which both speaker and interpreter are located.¹⁵ But in doing this, the interpreter is, at the same time, also connecting those utterances and beliefs with her own beliefs and attitudes. The overall truth of our beliefs, and the overall agreement of those beliefs with the beliefs of others, is thus a presupposition of the very possibility of interpretation – of being able to make sense of ourselves and of other speakers. Thus Davidson comments that:

So far from constituting a preserve so insulated that it is a problem how it can yield knowledge of an outside world or be known to others, thought is necessarily part of a common public world. Not only can others learn what we think by noting the causal dependencies that give our thoughts their content, but the very possibility of thought demands shared standards of truth and objectivity.¹⁶

That we do indeed have access to a public objective world is thus presupposed by the interpretative project. The world, and the beliefs we have about the world, are inextricably tied together. It is not the guarantee of a fit between beliefs and world that releases us from the need to justify our beliefs in general; it is because our beliefs and the world are already bound up together, in a way that renders unintelligible the notion of beliefs in general ‘fitting’ reality, that such justification is not needed. The model of interpretation that is at issue here, and that centers on the role of charity, is elaborated further, of course, in Davidson’s more recent deployment of the idea of triangulation. Our knowledge of ourselves, our knowledge of others and our knowledge of things – of the objects and events around us – interlock such that each variety of knowledge is dependent on the others. As a consequence, we cannot separate off our beliefs, knowledge of which is part of our own self-knowledge, from the world, from the beliefs of others, or from the varieties of knowledge that correspond with these. Thus the triangular inter-relation between the varieties of knowledge itself undercuts the ideas both of ‘fit’ and ‘lack of fit’ between beliefs in general and the world.

The holistic reading of Davidson that I have developed here suggests that any attempt to treat Davidson as straightforwardly either a realist or anti-realist will be mistaken from the very start. Inasmuch as realism and anti-realism are committed to a ‘global’ separation of the world from language, or of belief from reality, then the Davidsonian position will be opposed to both. This is a matter I will pursue further in subsequent discussion. For the moment, however, it is worth reiterating the point, made earlier in chapter six (§6.3.4), that the very close interconnection between beliefs and the world means that the question ‘might not our beliefs be consistent but mistaken?’ is fundamentally misconceived. It is misconceived because it assumes an impossible global contrast between beliefs on the one hand and the world on the other. Equally misconceived is the idea that we can construe reality as inaccessible to us or unknowable by us. Again, such a notion presupposes that belief can be pried away from the world, or language away from reality, in order to give sense to the idea of a separate and inaccessible realm of existence and this is something that cannot be done. There is no question, then, but that we always remain ‘in touch’ with reality. Indeed, the only sense that can be attached to talk of reality in this context is the world that we all share and to which we all have access, but which always resists reduction to any single description.¹⁷ As Davidson says in an oft-quoted and, I think, much misrepresented passage: ‘In giving up the dualism of scheme and world we do not give up the world but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects

whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false.¹⁸ Papineau and Nagel are quite correct in taking Davidson to be committed to the essential accessibility of reality and of the world. But whereas Papineau and Nagel view such a commitment as providing evidence of Davidsonian anti-realism, I view it as much more a commitment to a certain form of realism – a commitment, not to a correspondence theory of truth (which is what Davidson sometimes seems to take realism to involve¹⁹), but to the reality of the world that we encounter everyday and that, in conjunction with others, we constantly negotiate; a commitment to the reality of the world with which we are always entangled just in virtue of being creatures whose utterances have meaning and whose thoughts have content.

Perhaps one might view this Davidsonian commitment to ‘realism’, a commitment that follows from holism – from the impossibility of separating in any clear and generalized fashion, our knowledge and experience of the world from the world itself – as something like realism in the old-fashioned ‘Aristotelian’ sense that affirms the reality of the everyday world about us, that accepts the reality of the ‘phenomenal’, and that thereby affirms our access to the real, but the Davidsonian commitment at issue here is also something more than just this. Holism embodies a commitment to realism in virtue of the fact that the ‘phenomenal’ world that is made accessible in this way is indeed the ‘real’ world – a world in which we find ourselves, rather than a world found in us. This is to emphasize one of the central features of the idea of the world-horizon. That horizon is not, as I have emphasized in earlier chapters, a merely subjective notion, but rather a notion that expresses a unitary objectivity. The notion of the objective world is the notion of the absolute horizon within which all understanding is located. If the independence requirement is, indeed, the central feature of realism (the attachment of various forms of realism to correspondence theories of truth or to the possibility of global skepticism might be seen as mistaken attempts to articulate that basic requirement), then such ‘horizontal’ realism can legitimately be termed ‘realism’, for it does preserve a sense of the independence of the world.²⁰ It does so, in large part, by treating the notion of the world as horizontal and, moreover, as the ultimate horizon beyond which we cannot go.²¹

Of course, the independence requirement is partly what is expressed in the idea of skepticism, but Davidsonian holism can, and does, accept a limited version of skepticism. While we cannot make intelligible the possibility that most of our beliefs might be false (since holism rules out the possibility of any global ‘alienation’ of ourselves from the world), we can certainly accept that any one of our beliefs, or

even a large body of our beliefs, could be false – thus any particular theory about the world could be wrong and any particular sentence of our language could be false. That this is so is made explicit at the conclusion of ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’. There Davidson writes that: ‘though all of a believer’s beliefs are to some extent justified to him, some may not be justified enough, or in the right way, to constitute knowledge. The general presumption in favour of the truth of belief serves to rescue us from a standard form of skepticism by showing why it is impossible for all our beliefs to be false together.’²² Such local skepticism is all the skepticism that any realist should require.²³ In this respect Nagel and Papineau’s anti-realist readings of Davidsonian holism fail, as must any such anti-realist reading, not only in virtue of a misreading of Davidson’s own holistic commitments, but also in virtue of too strong a reading of the requirements of realism.

Davidson claims that our beliefs are, indeed, about a ‘common’, objective world (albeit a world the commonality of which need not be expressed in any commonality of description) – a world that is independent of us in the sense that we can always be wrong about the truth of any particular belief or beliefs, and that represents the absolute horizon with respect to which our beliefs are identified and within which we are located. This idea is built in to the very concept of belief, such that we cannot even make sense of the possibility that we might not have access to such an independent and objective world. The acceptance of this horizontal version of the ‘independence’ requirement is a part of the holistic rejection of skepticism and relativism. The rejection of skepticism and relativism should not, therefore, be taken to indicate that Davidsonian holism is anti-realist – though it does lead to a more subtle appreciation of the nature of the realism that is entailed by such holism. Yet the question of Davidsonian anti-realism is not, thereby, entirely settled. While the problem of skepticism has been one point of focus for the debate between realism and anti-realism, much of the debate has also centred on the problem of truth. Indeed, the problem of truth might be held to constitute a deeper and more fundamental problem. It is to that problem that I shall shortly turn.

Before I go on, however, there is one further question about the connection between realism and skepticism that is worth brief consideration. What assumptions lie behind the supposed need for an alliance between the realist and the skeptic? I would suggest, following Davidson’s own comments,²⁴ that it is essentially an assumption about reference. If one takes reference as the primary way in which words or

sentences relate to things, then truth will necessarily be seen as dependent upon referential connections, while those connections will nevertheless be largely independent of the truth of the sentences in which referring expressions occur. It was such autonomy of reference with respect to truth that I discussed in chapter five (§5.2.2) and which causal theories of reference were seen as preserving. If reference is independent of truth in this general way, however, then it will always be possible that the referential connections may be such that the overall truth of our beliefs is undermined and our beliefs turn out to be false. Global skepticism is thus a consequence of any referential theory that takes reference as primary and autonomous with respect to truth. Such referential theories may well be attractive to realists because they seem to emphasize a clear contrast between the linguistic (or more generally the mental or epistemic realm) and the extra-linguistic. They may also be attractive because they allow the relation between the two to be understood as consisting in a real causal relation. Davidson, of course, refuses to give any such priority to reference; he consequently avoids the skeptical trap into which the realist would otherwise fall.

7.2 Realism, anti-realism and truth

7.2.1 Realism and correspondence

Much of the longstanding debate about the realism/anti-realism dispute takes its point of departure from Dummett and his ‘semantic’ interpretation of the realist position. According to Dummett, the realism issue largely arises out of the question whether the meaning of a sentence ought to be identified with the truth conditions of that sentence. This, of course, leads on to the further question of whether truth should be understood in realist or verificationist terms. Is truth a matter of coherence or assertibility, or is it a matter of some sort of correspondence with a language-independent reality? More recently, this debate has metamorphosed somewhat into a debate concerning deflationist accounts of truth²⁵ – accounts that may be seen as, in some respects, continuing along lines already suggested by Dummett. The discussion here will make some brief reference to deflationist approaches, but will remain largely focused on the discussion as it originally arose around Dummett and the anti-realist challenge to truth as a central and ‘robust’ concept.

From the very start, it might seem as if a Davidsonian approach ought already be on the realist side here. Davidson has, as we saw in chapter two (§2.1.2), famously championed a truth-conditional

approach in semantics. Thus Dummett, in arguing against realism, originally took Davidson as his primary opponent,²⁶ while John McDowell and Mark Platts attempted to enlist Davidson in the cause of realism. The realism that McDowell and especially Platts seem to have had in mind is a realism that takes truth to be objective and language-independent, and that Platts claims is characterized by the idea that ‘the applicability of the truth predicate to a sentence is determined by extra-linguistic reality’.²⁷ Here Platts appears to take the second of the features of realism mentioned by Putnam – acceptance of some form of correspondence theory of truth – as the basis for a strong realist reading of Davidson.²⁸

Davidsonian ‘realism’ can be seen, on such an account, to be a consequence of Davidson’s adoption of a Tarskian truth theory as the model for his theory of meaning simply because the central Tarskian notion of satisfaction is a relation between terms and objects or sequences of objects – it relates linguistic items with non-linguistic objects. Mark Platts certainly sees the Tarskian account of truth as committed to realism. Since the meaning of a sentence is seen as determined by its truth conditions, and since the truth conditions of a sentence are given in a Tarskian T-sentence, so the Davidsonian account of meaning is one that understands meaning as given in the relation between sentences and extra-linguistic reality. This realist reading of Davidson has, however, been disputed by Frederick Stoutland who once claimed, contra Platts, that Davidson is, in fact, a semantic anti-realist. Stoutland based this claim on Davidson’s rejection of skepticism and of standard versions of the correspondence theory of truth.²⁹

Criticism of correspondence theories of truth was certainly a feature of many idealist philosophies. But idealism need not be the same as anti-realism. Moreover, worries about the correspondence relation are not restricted to idealists. The difficulties of understanding truth in terms of correspondence were set out by P. F. Strawson in his criticisms of J. L. Austin’s correspondence theory of truth. Strawson claimed that one cannot elucidate the notion of truth in terms of any sort of correspondence between statements and facts – such a direct attempt on the problem cannot provide the necessary elucidation ‘for these words contain the problem, not its solution’.³⁰ Moving away from talk of truth to talk of correspondence merely shifts the focus for the problem. Instead of ‘what is truth?’, the question now becomes ‘what is correspondence?’

In fact the problem of elucidating truth in terms of correspondence faces problems exactly analogous to those faced in elucidating the relation between a conceptual scheme and its empirical content. There the difficulty was that talk of a scheme ‘organizing’ or ‘fitting’ some content was either

unintelligible or reducible to the notion of a scheme being true. So too does the attempt to specify the nature of correspondence return us to the concept of truth. A similar point is part of Davidson's argument against skepticism. One cannot defeat the skeptic by trying to show how one's beliefs reflect or correspond to reality, since for a belief to 'correspond' to reality is just for it to be true. So the claim that a belief 'corresponds' to or 'reflects' reality provides no justification for the claim that the belief is true. The one claim merely restates the other.

There is, moreover, a further similarity between Davidson's attack on the scheme/content distinction and his attack on correspondence accounts of truth. Just as it is unclear exactly what the empirical content might be that a conceptual scheme is supposed to 'organize' or 'fit', so it is equally difficult to see what it is to which true sentences could 'correspond'. Part of the problem here can be expressed using a famous argument first deployed by Frege – the so-called 'slingshot argument' – which directs attention to the difficulties in adequately individuating the 'facts' to which true sentences are, at least according to standard version of the correspondence theory, supposed to correspond. If one cannot distinguish between the different facts to which sentences do or do not correspond, but maintains that truth consists in correspondence with the facts, then the only conclusion to be drawn would seem to be that all true sentences refer to the same fact.³¹ The difficulty in making sense of the idea of 'correspondence to the facts' is indicative of the more general problem affecting the attempt to understand truth in terms of correspondence. Thus Davidson argues in 'True to the Facts' (repeating the argument in 'The Structure and Content of Truth') that there is simply nothing in the world that could make sentences true and he writes:

...the notion of fitting the facts, or of being true to the facts, adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true ... Nothing ... no thing, makes sentences and theories true: not experience, not surface irritations, not the world, can make a sentence true. That experience takes a certain course, that our skin is warmed or punctured, that the universe is finite, these facts, if we like to talk that way, make sentences and theories true. But this point is put better without mention of facts. The sentence 'My skin is warm' is true if and only if my skin is warm. Here is no reference to a fact, a world, an experience, or a piece of evidence.³²

Davidson claims that there is no way of getting access to the notion of correspondence independently of the notion of truth itself. To say that 'x is true' means 'x corresponds to the facts' provides no elucidation of

the predicate 'is true'. Correspondence is just another way of talking about truth, and not a way of telling us what truth is. We have no grasp on the notion of correspondence aside from our grasp on the notion of truth, and talk of correspondence itself relies upon a prior notion of truth. This is the point that Strawson seems to suggest; it is also a point that Frege explicitly advances against the correspondence theory as such:

...could we not maintain that there is truth where there is correspondence in a certain respect? But which respect? For in that case what ought we to do so as to decide whether something is true? We should have to inquire whether it is true that an idea and a reality, say, correspond in a specified respect. And then we should be confronted by a question of the same kind and the game could begin again. So the attempted explanation of truth as correspondence breaks down. For in a definition certain characteristics would have to be specified. And in application to any particular case, the question would arise whether it were true that the characteristics were present. So we should be going round in a circle.³³

Any attempt to define truth as correspondence must thus presuppose, in one way or another, the very concept of truth that it aims to define (the slingshot argument could be viewed as merely making this point in a very specific fashion).

Yet it is not merely that the attempt to define truth is circular – truth is presupposed by any attempt at definition in general. This is so in the sense that all definition presupposes a background of true belief if the definition is to be intelligible. 'Nothing ... no thing' Davidson tells us 'makes our sentences and theories true'. And this is not merely because there is a problem in making independent sense of the correspondence relation, or of whatever it is to which true sentences correspond. It is also because most of our beliefs must always be true prior to any attempt to compare beliefs with reality or with 'the facts'. The attempt to make such comparison presupposes the identification of the beliefs to be compared, and that already presupposes a background of mostly true belief – a broader horizontal setting – against which the identification can be made. So it is not correspondence with the world or the facts that, in general, makes our beliefs true. It is rather the truth of those beliefs in general that makes correspondence itself possible. So the world does not make our beliefs true; instead, that most of our beliefs are true is a presupposition of having beliefs and of those beliefs being about the world. Moreover, it is not just that truth is required to enable us to identify correspondences. Beliefs and meanings are themselves constituted holistically: they are constituted by their location against a largely true background, within a local horizon that is itself located within the overall

horizon of the world. Without truth there is no possibility of correspondence, because there are no beliefs and no sentences with which anything can correspond.

Correspondence presupposes truth as the necessary background to belief and assertion. The establishing of the truth of some particular definition itself assumes, however, that we already have an understanding of the concept of truth, and some means of establishing the applicability of the truth predicate to some particular definitional claim. This latter point is evident in Tarski's own 'theory' of truth – a theory that purports to give us no more than an account of the operation of the truth-predicate for the object language, and that presupposes our grasp of the operation of the truth-predicate in the metalanguage. In this respect, even Tarski's technical account of truth presupposes, in its turn, a prior grasp of the notion of truth – a grasp expressed in our capacity to speak and understand our own language. Of course, there is a colloquial sense in which we can talk of sentences as describing how things are, as 'corresponding to the facts'. But such talk does not elucidate truth; it merely substitutes another expression for the phrase 'is true'. Inasmuch as utterances and beliefs are identified by being connected with things in the world, so they can be said to be identified by being connected with known truths. In this respect truth as correspondence is dependent on a prior notion of truth.

Davidson's rejection of the correspondence theory leads Frederick Stoutland to argue that Davidson's philosophy of language is actually opposed to realism, or at least to realism in semantics. Stoutland labels Davidson's position an 'anti-realist' one.³⁴ 'Anti-realism' is originally Dummett's term for those positions that involve a rejection of the principle of bivalence – a principle according to which every sentence is either true or false.³⁵ The rejection of bivalence follows from the anti-realist's commitment to a verificationist approach to meaning. Dummett has himself been the most vigorous champion of anti-realism. He claims that the truth-conditions that constitute the meaning of a sentence cannot be such that we could never verify whether or not they obtained. Dummett identifies realism with the view that truth-conditions can be transcendent in this respect. His own anti-realism involves the denial of the possibility of the verification-transcendence of meaning on the grounds that such transcendence would undermine the possibility of learning the meanings of those sentences.

Dummettian anti-realism thus involves a form of verificationism, and Davidson's own position has sometimes, as we saw in chapter six (§6.3.4), been regarded as verificationist itself. Admittedly,

Davidson does not have to be committed to the strong Dummettian claim that truth conditions should be verificationist, and Dummett himself takes Davidson to be representative of realism in semantics.

Nevertheless, Davidson's rejection of metaphysical realism suggests that the distance between himself and Dummett is not so great as it may have at first appeared. Davidson's rejection of the possibility of a clear distinction between language and the world has some affinities with the Dummettian rejection of the possibility that truth-conditions may come adrift from the possibility of verification; moreover, for both Dummett and Davidson, the possibility of meaning depends on keeping truth and meaning (and the world with them) within our reach. Metaphysical realism, on the other hand, seems to require a separation between truth and meaning.

So there is some basis to Stoutland's talk of Davidson's 'anti-realism', but Stoutland's use of the term is not quite the same as Dummett's and, in fact, Stoutland is less concerned to assimilate Davidson to Dummett, as to rebut the realist reading of Davidson by McDowell and Platts, and Stoutland is surely correct in claiming that such realist readings of Davidson are mistaken. Of course, there is prima facie support for such a realist reading in Davidson's employment of a Tarski-style theory of truth as the form that a theory of meaning should take, since the Tarskian approach is often seen as embodying a correspondence theory of truth. This might lead to the view that, if there are elements of anti-realism in Davidson, then they are inconsistent with his adoption of a Tarskian approach. But the Davidsonian use of a Tarskian truth theory does not justify such a conclusion. The use of Tarski must be understood against a wider background in which there can be no clear separation of the linguistic from the extra-linguistic, and, as a consequence, the adoption of the Tarskian approach by Davidson cannot be taken to imply any associated commitment to the idea of truth as a matter of correspondence 'to the facts' or of sentences being 'made true' by such correspondence. Indeed, the Tarskian account should not itself be taken as providing any account of truth simpliciter.

7.2.2 Tarski and correspondence

Davidson has discussed the connection between Tarski's theory of truth and correspondence theories in a number of places and his position has changed somewhat from his first comments on the matter to his most recent.³⁶

In the 'Introduction' to Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation Davidson claims that, while the Tarskian theory is a correspondence theory, it is not a correspondence theory of the usual sort. Of the Tarskian truth theory he writes: 'Such theories do not, like most correspondence theories, explain truth by finding entities such as facts for true sentences to correspond to ... On the other hand theories of truth of the kind considered here do require that a relation between entities and expressions be characterized ("satisfaction").'³⁷ So on this account, if the Tarskian theory of truth is a correspondence theory, it is a correspondence theory that does not involve the notion of correspondence to the facts. The notion of satisfaction, Tarski's use of which is the basis for any claim that the Tarskian account is a correspondence account, is not a relation of correspondence between sentences and facts, but a relation involving open sentences that can be satisfied by sequences of objects.³⁸ In keeping with this line of thinking, Davidson has argued for the preservation of some form of correspondence theory of truth. In 'True to the Facts' Davidson quotes Strawson's description of J. L. Austin's 'purified version of the correspondence theory of truth' – 'to say that a statement is true is to say that a certain speech-episode is related in a certain conventional way to something in the world exclusive of itself'³⁹ – and comments:

It is this theory Strawson has in mind when he says, 'The correspondence theory requires, not purification, but elimination'. I would not want to defend the details of Austin's conception of correspondence, and many of the points I have made against the strategy of facts echo Strawson's criticisms. But the debilities of particular formulations of the correspondence theory ought not be held against the theory. If I am right, by appealing to Tarski's semantical conception of truth, we can defend a theory that almost exactly fits Strawson's description of Austin's 'purified version of the correspondence theory of truth'. And this theory deserves, not elimination, but elaboration.⁴⁰

So, in his original reading of Tarski against this semantic background, Davidson can be seen to have provided us with a 'purified'⁴¹ version of the old correspondence theory of truth – a correspondence theory shorn of its metaphysical fleece – a correspondence theory that is embodied in the very methodology of Davidsonian radical interpretation whereby we look to the world in order to interpret the utterances of speakers.⁴²

In the 'The Structure and Content of Truth', however, as well as in other essays, Davidson denies that the Tarskian account is a correspondence account at all and rejects his earlier commitment to a

correspondence theory of truth.⁴³ The main reason for this change of mind seems to lie in Davidson's recognition that there is simply no good reason to treat the Tarskian account as a correspondence theory in the first place. Certainly the satisfaction relation provides little basis for such a treatment. Summarizing both the argument in favor of treating the Tarskian theory as a correspondence theory, and the objection to it, Davidson writes:

The argument is this. Truth is defined on the basis of satisfaction: a sentence of the object language is true if and only if it is satisfied by every sequence of the objects over which the variables of quantification of the object language range. Take 'corresponds to' as 'satisfies' and you have defined truth as correspondence. The oddity of the idea is evident from the counterintuitive and contrived nature of the entities to which sentences 'correspond' and from the fact that all true sentences would correspond to the same entities.⁴⁴

Elsewhere Davidson comments that 'I thought that the fact that in characterizing truth for a language it is necessary to put words into relation with objects was enough to give some grip for the idea of correspondence; but this now seems to me a mistake. The mistake is in a way only a misnomer, but terminological infelicities have a way of breeding conceptual confusion'.⁴⁵ If all that correspondence implied was the idea that truth involved the relating of sentences to the world, then the Tarskian account, and Davidson's with it, could be termed a correspondence account. Yet this would be to employ a highly attenuated sense of 'correspondence' and one far removed from the sense usually at issue in the correspondence theory of truth.

The idea of truth as having some connection with the relation between sentences and the world, an idea that clearly underlies the correspondence theory and that also makes it initially attractive as an account of truth, is not an idea that can or should be dispensed with. But that idea can be preserved without taking it as justifying commitment to truth as a matter of correspondence. As we have already seen, the very notion of correspondence is beset with difficulties that make it impossible to render it in any significant and meaningful fashion – there is little point on talking of correspondence when it seems there is properly nothing to which true sentences could correspond. Since correspondence adds nothing to the idea of truth, we would do better to simply talk of truth and abandon correspondence altogether.

Davidson's rejection of correspondence as the fundamental notion in making sense of truth is clearly connected with his rejection of the idea that the concept of reference has a central role to play in a theory of interpretation. This was something I touched on obliquely in the discussion above (§3.2.3 and §5.2.2). Neither reference nor satisfaction can be taken as the primary concepts in interpretation or in the elucidation of truth. Reference must be dependent upon a prior notion of truth (this is why Davidson regards the theory of reference as of secondary importance – a theory of reference will be 'fallout' from a theory of interpretation), as is the concept of satisfaction. Davidson himself makes this point quite explicitly, writing that:

A general and pre-analytic notion of truth is presupposed by the theory. It is because we have this notion that we can tell what counts as evidence for the truth of a T-sentence. But the same is not required of the concepts of reference and satisfaction. Their role is theoretical, and so we know all there is to know about them when we know how they operate to characterize truth. We don't need a general concept of reference in the construction of an adequate theory.⁴⁶

The point is repeated by Davidson elsewhere: 'truth is the semantic concept we understand best. Reference and related semantic notions like satisfaction are, by comparison, theoretical concepts.'⁴⁷ More generally, we can now see that any concept that involves the idea of a relation between language and the world must presuppose a prior grasp of the notion of truth, just as it will also presuppose our prior access to the world.

7.2.3 Anti-realism and coherence

If commitment to a Tarskian account of truth cannot be taken to imply a commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, then Frederick Stoutland is surely correct in claiming claims that Davidson's employment of Tarski does not warrant the reading of Davidson as committed either to any straightforward correspondence-to-the-facts account of truth nor to the sort of realism proposed by Platts. This is not to say, however, that Davidson is really an idealist or anti-realist after all. We have already seen that there is good reason to view Davidson as a 'realist' in a certain limited sense. Thus, as Davidson himself suggests,⁴⁸ the mistake is to assume that anti-realism is the only position available once a certain version of realism has been abandoned.

Nevertheless, Stoutland himself claims that the Davidsonian approach to the philosophy of language is an anti-realist one. In fact Stoutland labels Davidson an ‘internal realist’⁴⁹ – a phrase that Hilary Putnam also uses in distinguishing another ‘form’ of realism from that embodied in metaphysical or ‘external’ realism. Internal realism is characterised by Putnam such that the internal realist effectively denies each of the three theses that make up metaphysical realism. Internal realism is realism internal, or relative to some conceptual scheme. It preserves some notion of truth as correspondence, but such correspondence is itself internal to the particular scheme. In this respect, truth is seen as more a matter of the coherence of utterances with the rest of the scheme (because what objects there are to correspond to is itself determined by the scheme), than merely a matter of correspondence, and is treated largely as equivalent to assertibility.⁵⁰ Putnam’s internal realism is, in fact, much more akin to what other philosophers – particularly Devitt and Nagel – would see as a form of anti-realism rather than realism proper.

Stoutland notes Putnam’s account of internal realism, and is careful to point out that he does not mean the phrase in quite the way that Putnam uses it.⁵¹ This is because it is quite clear that Davidson must reject any internal realism of the sort characterized by Putnam, for internal realism seems to be little more than a form of epistemological relativism, and such relativism Davidson must reject. Indeed, while some scheme/content distinction may be implicit in metaphysical realism, it is clearly an explicit element in Putnam’s internal realism. The presence of this distinction alone is enough to cast doubt on the acceptability of such ‘realism’. Consequently, Davidson denies that his position is an ‘internal’ realism on the grounds that ‘internal realism makes truth relative to a scheme and this is an idea I do not think is intelligible’.⁵² So the internal realism Stoutland attributes to Davidson makes no reference to truth ‘internal to’ a conceptual scheme. But Stoutland does claim that Davidsonian internal realism is part of what Stoutland sees as Davidson’s ‘overall anti-realism’, according to which sentences ‘are true in virtue of their role in human practice’.⁵³ Stoutland thus avoids the internalization of truth to conceptual schemes, but retains the internalism of ‘internal’ realism insofar as truth is seen to be internal to, or dependent on, human practices’.⁵⁴ Such an account of Davidson seems to assimilate the Davidsonian position almost to that of Dummett himself.

Stoutland's anti-realist interpretation of Davidson might appear to be strengthened by Davidson's apparent adoption of a form of coherence theory of truth,⁵⁵ for coherence theories have typically been associated with idealist and verificationist approaches. One could view a form of Davidsonian coherentism as following from the thesis of psychological holism, and from Davidson's explicitly holistic approach to belief. For, of course, holism leads to 'a presumption in favor of the truth of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief'.⁵⁶ This is because, as we have seen, it would be impossible even to identify beliefs unless such a presumption held. Truth and belief are thus interdependent notions (since 'belief is in its nature veridical') that are brought together by meaning. The meaning of a sentence is given by the objective truth conditions of the sentence. The test of truth is coherence.⁵⁷ The coherence of a belief with a set of other beliefs held true provides a test of truth that does not require us to attempt the impossible task of directly comparing (or 'confronting') beliefs with reality. Moreover, as coherence is a test of truth, so it is also the test for correspondence. 'Coherence yields correspondence' Davidson tells us – a 'correspondence without confrontation'.⁵⁸ In fact, the relation between coherence and correspondence can be viewed as analogous to the relation, within the project of interpretation, between the interpretation and identification of particular beliefs (by a process that proceeds largely by matching beliefs with their worldly causes) and the 'charitable' presupposition that the speaker's beliefs will be, for the most part, coherent and in agreement with our own. Coherence could thus be said to be presupposed by correspondence as charity (in the Davidsonian sense) is presupposed by interpretation. So coherence might appear to be the fundamental notion in Davidsonian holism.

Stoutland takes the priority given to coherence here as evidence of Davidsonian anti-realism, since he identifies realism with the view that it is 'extra-linguistic objects [that] explain why any sentence is true or false (independently of which are held true)', and he takes internal realism as the view that 'it is the truth of most of our sentences which explains why any have truth relevant connections to extra-linguistic objects'.⁵⁹ Stoutland is not alone in attributing to Davidson a coherence view of truth, but he is certainly mistaken in doing so. One reason for this is that the coherentism Stoutland attributes to Davidson is not a theory of truth at all, but a theory of evidence. In fact (and this is the real reason why Stoutland's attribution is mistaken), neither correspondence nor coherence can ever provide an account of truth, and the reason is the same in both cases, even if we assume that these notions have some real connection with the concept of

truth (something we might, in any case, dispute), coherence must presuppose truth just as correspondence does. That a belief coheres with other beliefs already presupposes a notion of truth in its very employment of the notion of coherence with other beliefs. For, given that holism is a constitutive thesis, the beliefs with which a belief coheres must be mostly true if coherence itself is to be possible. Thus Stoutland's anti-realist construal of Davidson's position fails, even given the apparently significant role of coherence in Davidson's account, since Davidson retains a conception of truth that is presupposed even by the notion of coherence.

Davidson can rightly comment, then, that 'Truth is beautifully transparent compared to belief and coherence and I take it as primitive.'⁶⁰ As a consequence he can offer no account of truth as such. Truth remains a presuppositional notion – unanalyzed and unanalyzable. On this matter we seem to reach the same conclusion as Frege is led to by his consideration of the correspondence theory of truth. It is not that the correspondence theory alone presupposes a prior notion of truth, but that any attempt to explicate truth, whether it takes the form of a correspondence or coherence account, must presuppose such a notion. Although truth is connected with the idea of a certain relation between sentences and the world, as well as with the idea of a certain consistency among beliefs, it cannot be identified with the obtaining of such a relation or of such consistency. Thus, as Frege says, 'it seems likely that the content of the word "true" is sui generis and indefinable'.⁶¹

7.3 The centrality of truth

7.3.1 Davidson's 'presuppositional' account of truth

The issue between realists and anti-realists has often been seen to center on the question of truth. Yet, on this matter, Davidson's own account of truth does not enable him to be placed neatly on either side of the realist/anti-realist debate. He rejects any attempt to understand truth in terms of some other concept or concepts – in terms of either correspondence or coherence. Truth is, in fact, a defining concept for Davidson, rather than a defined one. That this should be so is perhaps an obvious consequence of Davidson's employment of Tarski, whereby truth is used to elucidate meaning, and where the technical Tarskian machinery does, in any case, presuppose speakers' mastery of the truth predicate at work in their home language. Obvious or not, however, it may seem to leave the issue of realism somewhat muddled,

since realism has typically been viewed as associated with a correspondence view of truth. Consequently, if Davidson is in any sense a realist, then the realism with which he is associated must be a realism that is not tied to correspondence.

In fact, as I noted in §7.1, Davidson is best understood as committed to what I have called a ‘horizontal’ realism; as such, it rejects global skepticism, and, as we can now see, it also rejects both coherence and correspondence as adequate accounts of truth. The reason for rejecting either account of truth is simple: truth is itself ultimately a horizontal notion. It is a notion tied to the idea of the world-horizon, and to the idea of the horizontal unity of the psychological. The horizontal character of truth is something that I shall say more about shortly. For the moment, however, I would simply note that this way of understanding truth has so far gone almost completely unrecognized within the contemporary debate, at least as that debate has usually been conducted. Similarly, the notion of horizontal realism, as I have developed it here, has gained scant recognition. Thus I can agree with Davidson that so far as realism and anti-realism, under their standard construals, are concerned, ‘we should refuse to endorse either... We must find another way of viewing the matter.’⁶²

The idea of truth as a horizontal notion might seem to be what is partly captured by the idea of truth as presuppositional, that is, as a notion presupposed by the Davidsonian account rather than explicated through it. A ‘presuppositional’ account of truth comprises both the idea that truth is a defining and not a defined concept, and the emphasis on the central role truth has in interpretation and understanding. It is to this latter role that Davidson refers, in somewhat Kantian terms, when he says that ‘the concept of truth [is] an essential part of the scheme we all necessarily employ for understanding, criticizing, explaining, and predicting thought and action’.⁶³ Truth thus becomes a background or ‘framework’ – even a ‘transcendental’ – concept with respect to which other concepts are located.

The concept of truth that is required here, though it is unanalyzed and unanalyzable, is nevertheless the concept of truth as objective – it could not perform its presuppositional function otherwise. Consequently, as we have seen already, Davidson’s rejection of certain metaphysical construals of correspondence is accompanied by a rejection of skepticism and of relativism. Davidson’s use of truth as a presuppositional notion could, therefore, be viewed as a parallel to his emphasis on the way in which the objectivity of the world is also presupposed in interpretation. Both truth and world turn out to be

presuppositional (or even 'transcendental') notions for Davidson, insofar as they underlie the possibility of language and of interpretation in general.

Davidson's insistence on the presuppositional character of truth and world is itself the strongest reason for regarding him as a realist. For Davidson to utterly reject that title is for him to fail to recognize an essential element of his position – realism surely implies, above all else, a certain regard for the reality of our own experience of the world and a confidence in the possibility of speaking truly (as well as a commitment to such speaking). It is this sense of realism that can be lost or obscured by the particular use of the term 'realism' that is current in much contemporary philosophizing, and that sometimes goes under the title of 'metaphysical' realism. Moreover, while Davidson is clearly opposed to metaphysical realism, his position nevertheless allows for much of what is demanded even by this contemporary brand of realism. In particular, as we saw earlier, Davidson can attach some sense to the idea expressed in the metaphysical realist's 'independence' requirement, insofar as he can certainly accept some limited versions of skepticism and fallibilism.

Yet in its emphasis on the presuppositional character of truth (both in respect of the principle of charity as well as in its use of Tarski), and its rejection of any coherence account of truth, Davidson's position seems to be directly opposed to that of a variety of philosophers (including many anti-realists) who view truth as either a matter of assertability or who reject the notion outright as a mere illusion or conversational compliment. The latter view can perhaps be seen as epitomized in Nietzsche's famous comment on truth (cited by Derrida⁶⁴) that truth is nothing but: 'A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions.'⁶⁵ Nietzsche, in fact, occupies a very important, interesting and by no means simple position with respect to truth. It is, indeed, in Nietzsche that truth first appears as problematic. It is Nietzsche who, in attacking and ridiculing the common currency of talk about truth, also implicitly suggests the need for a rethinking of the notion of truth itself. Yet Nietzsche's comments in the above passage, and other comments like it, mean that Nietzsche has, in many ways, come to symbolize an abandonment of concern for truth – an abandonment that seems to have become a characteristic feature of much contemporary philosophizing.

Such an attitude to truth is apparent, within the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, in much of Richard Rorty's thinking, particularly in Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.⁶⁶ Rorty is, of course, of particular interest, since he has made extensive use of Davidsonian ideas, and has attempted to assimilate Davidson to his own 'pragmatist' position.⁶⁷ Another example of a similar attitude to truth, although more explicitly relativist, is to be found in Nelson Goodman's work, particularly in the book Ways of Worldmaking.⁶⁸ Davidson himself refers specifically to Goodman's relativism. 'Relativism about truth' he says 'is perhaps always a symptom of infection by the epistemological virus; this seems to be true in any case for Quine, Nelson Goodman and Putnam'.⁶⁹ Within poststructuralist and post-modernist thinking, while a straightforward relativization of truth is less common, there does seem to be a similar tendency to treat truth as something that is either a form of metaphysical nostalgia, or a rhetorical device used to justify or disguise relations of power. This is certainly how the work of such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault is often read.⁷⁰ Yet truth cannot be dispensed with in any of these ways, since, as we have already seen, truth is presupposed by understanding itself. Moreover, the plurality of discourse need not be seriously threatened by the presuppositional account of truth. One can maintain a sense of the way in which there might be a plurality of local horizons – of local spheres of discourse or local objectifications of the world – even though all such local horizons stand within the overall horizon of the world, and presuppose a unitary concept of truth.

7.3.2 The problematic character of truth in Davidson

The idea of truth as presuppositional is one way of expressing what is involved in the idea of truth as a horizontal concept. The presuppositional character of truth means that it cannot be analysed or reduced to other notions. Truth is thus a background notion against which other notions are located. But, for all its presuppositional character Davidson seems to offer surprisingly little in the way of a positive account of truth. Thus, while one way of reading Davidson is to take his project as one which is concerned with working out a theory of meaning founded precisely upon the presuppositional character of truth, one could also say that in Davidson the presuppositional character of truth serves only to highlight the analytically problematic character of the concept.

That truth is a problematic notion is something that is evident in the work of other philosophers besides Davidson. But in Davidson the central role given to truth makes its analytically problematic character even clearer and more significant. In this respect one could take the idea of truth as 'horizontal' or 'presuppositional' as, in fact, destructive of any substantive concept of truth at all. This could lead to the problematic conclusion that Davidson's treatment of truth really constitutes a reductio of the entire project of a truth-conditional semantics, insofar as that project relies fundamentally on a notion with respect to which it cannot provide any analysis.

One way of defending Davidson against such a conclusion would be to revert to a form of deflationist attitude toward truth, and to reply that it is not that we can say nothing about truth, but rather that there is no more to say about truth that has not already been said by Tarski. Of course, Tarski aims only to give us a definition of truth for a language; he does not say anything about truth as such. So if Tarski has said all there is to say about truth, then there is presumably nothing to say about truth as a more general notion. Perhaps that is just the point. It is not that, left over from the Tarskian analysis, there remains a mysterious and inaccessible notion of truth simpliciter. Rather there is no such notion that remains to be explicated. Truth, it might be said, is always a 'local' concept of which we have an understanding only when applied to particular languages and portions of languages (sentences or whatever). There is no broader, more universal notion to be understood. If truth is the ground for understanding, then it is only such in virtue of the fact that understanding always presupposes our grasp of the truth-predicate that operates within our own language. Understanding, we might say, presupposes mastery of a truth theory – that is, mastery of a language; it does not presuppose anything more.

This line of thinking could be seen as in the spirit of Davidson's overall approach, and is certainly very consistent with, for instance, Bjørn Ramberg's reading of Davidson.⁷¹ It suggests that Davidson 'deconstructs' the notion of truth as well as the notion of meaning. Such a reading is also very close to that adopted by Richard Rorty.⁷² Yet this view of truth is, in fact, one that Davidson has rejected quite explicitly in 'The Structure and Content of Truth'. That he ought to reject it is evident in much of his writing even prior to the lectures published under that title. Thus he says in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' that: 'Truth, as applied to utterances of sentences, shows the disquotational feature enshrined in Tarski's Convention T, and that is enough to fix its domain of application. Relative to a language or a

speaker, of course, so there is more to truth than [sic] Convention T; there is whatever carries over from language to language or speaker to speaker.’⁷³ In ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’ he goes even further in making explicit the fact that he regards truth as a central notion, and yet also a notion that is not adequately accounted for by Tarski: ‘My own view is that Tarski has told us much of what we want to know about the concept of truth, and that there must be more. There must be more because there is no indication in Tarski’s formal work of what it is that his various truth predicates have in common, and this must be part of the content of the concept.’⁷⁴ Here Davidson also makes clear that his aim, at least in ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, is to provide an account that gives us more of what we want to know about truth than Tarski does.

To this end Davidson ties the notion of truth more explicitly to the holistic structure of interpretation. He writes: ‘We recognized that truth must somehow be related to the attitudes of rational creatures; this relation is now revealed as springing from the nature of interpersonal understanding ... The conceptual underpinning of interpretation is a theory of truth; truth thus rests in the end on belief and, even more ultimately, on the affective attitudes.’⁷⁵ Truth plays too large a role in the Davidsonian account, and too large a role in language and in understanding, for it to be a notion that can be completely deconstructed or ‘deflated’. A theory of truth is fundamental – presuppositional, in fact – to the possibility of semantics, and to the possibility of interpretation. Of course, this passage might also be taken to suggest that truth is nevertheless underlain by belief, and by the system of attitudes. Yet truth cannot be explained in terms of belief or attitude, since belief; in particular, relies on a notion of truth for its own explication. So we must take Davidson’s comments here as indicating the way in which truth, as it underpins the theory of interpretation, is thereby tied to the holistic character of the psychological realm in which beliefs and other attitudes are constituted.

The centrality of truth to the possibility of understanding and interpretation is something that we have already seen in preceding chapters. That it should be so central is a function of the holistic character of the psychological. And, while Davidson makes clear that his account of truth is not restricted merely to Tarski, Davidson does little, in ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, to provide any further articulation of this structure than has already appeared elsewhere. The underpinning of interpretation is a theory of truth. But any particular theory of truth, and any particular theory of interpretation (as well as the theory of

attitudes incorporated within it) depends, in turn, on a concept of truth that plays a role in the theory and yet is not exhausted by that role. The concept of truth is not, moreover, restricted to the role of the concept in interpretation. Davidson's account emphasizes the centrality of truth in interpretation, yet this centrality only reflects the fundamental role truth has in general. Just as the structures to which Davidson directs our attention in interpretation are also the fundamental structures of understanding and of the psychological as such, so truth is fundamental, not merely to interpretation and communication, but to our understanding of ourselves and our relation to the world. Yet for all that the notion is so central – for all that it is continually presupposed – it remains, in Davidson's discussion, curiously opaque.

Thus, even though Davidson's account of truth does move beyond the technical Tarskian account, and even though truth is clearly a central concept for Davidson, still his account does not provide the sort of elucidation of the role of truth that we might have hoped for. Of course, neither does Davidson provide any integrated account of the holism that underlies so much of his thinking, and as my discussion of the issue of holism has often involved an implicit critique of the Davidsonian position (if only because of its failure to take up that issue in sufficient detail), so that disagreement has now come to the fore with the focus on truth. For as Davidson fails to provide any articulation of the broader horizons of interpretation or of the holism that looms so large in his account, neither does he provide any elaboration of the horizontal role of truth itself. In large part this omission (if omission it is) seems to be a function of the particular orientation of the Davidsonian project itself. While Davidson's work is undoubtedly broad in scope, ranging from epistemology through philosophy of language to philosophy of mind, his consideration of the problems of interpretation seems to arise, at least initially, out of a concern with certain fairly technical problems in semantic theory and the philosophy of language. His overall orientation is, moreover, one that leaves little room for the sort of account that I have tried to develop here. Davidson lacks, in a sense, the phenomenological and hermeneutic tools that it seems he really requires. Thus the central notion of horizontality does not appear in his work, and, perhaps, could not appear given the horizons within which that work is itself constituted.

If my elaboration of the Davidsonian account is correct, then any adequate account of truth must move in the direction of a more adequate articulation of the holistic structure that is implicit in Davidson's work. It must, in particular, offer a fuller account of the connection between truth and horizontality, and thus

provide a fuller account of the idea of truth as itself a horizontal notion. Consequently, my attempt to develop a more integrated and detailed account of Davidsonian holism is also part of an attempt to provide the basis for a more adequate understanding of truth itself. But what should be clear from the discussion here, and in preceding chapters, is that the development of such an account cannot remain within the narrow framework of semantic theory or traditional philosophy of language. Indeed, the way in which the presuppositional and problematic character of truth becomes evident in Davidson may suggest the extent to which Davidson's account cannot remain within the confines of traditional analytic philosophy either. My purpose here has been to develop a 'Davidsonian' account beyond those confines. Part of that account was the articulation of the holistic structure of the psychological – something undertaken in previous chapters. What follows is the remainder and completion of that account: the attempt to provide an articulation of the horizontal notion of truth itself.

7.4 A horizontal account of truth

7.4.1 Horizon and presupposition

The notion of truth is clearly a central notion in Davidson's thinking. It seems to be a notion central to understanding and to the psychological in general. Yet the traditional accounts of truth are unable to provide an account of truth that does justice to its centrality. Indeed, all such accounts seem always to presuppose, rather than to explicate, the notion. This becomes very clear in Davidson's own thinking. Truth is there seen as a notion that plays a role I have termed 'horizontal'. The horizontal character of truth might be seen as a way of capturing the presuppositional character of truth. But to say that truth is presupposed does not provide us with an account of truth, it merely tells us where truth stands in relation to certain other concepts.

The notion of horizontality is, as I have said elsewhere, tied to the idea of the unity of a project and the location of the objects of the project within a field of inter-relations. Any particular horizon implicates, and is implicated in, many other horizons. Since the notion of horizontality involves the notions of unity and implication, it is possible that one might regard the sense in which truth is horizontal as just the sense in which truth is presupposed as a principle of underlying unity and consistency. Such a way of viewing matters would, however, be mistaken. It would suggest a conflation of truth with the world-horizon and

would, moreover, return us to something like a notion of truth as coherence – though a purely formal coherence nonetheless. And, while the notion of coherence undoubtedly does direct our attention toward the horizontal unity of the psychological, it would nevertheless be a mistake to take this as indicating that a coherence theory will, after all, be adequate as an account of truth. Coherence has a role in horizontality, but that does not provide a reason for ignoring the problems that inevitably attach to any attempt to treat truth as fundamentally a matter of coherence.⁷⁶ Truth cannot be identified with coherence.

The idea of truth as a presuppositional notion is not itself however, entirely unproblematic. For such an idea might suggest that truth is something that we presuppose in order that our projects can be pursued. One way of taking this point would be to say that truth is simply a notion we need, and so presuppose, because of certain practical requirements, or because we cannot but help resort to such a notion – its use is simply a feature of our language, just as the use of greetings like ‘hello’ is similarly an ubiquitous feature of linguistic practice. Such a pragmatic reading is one that Rorty might be seen, at times, to adopt. Yet truth cannot be something presupposed in this way. To think of truth as something we presuppose would be to take the projects in which we are involved, and the horizons within which those projects are constituted, as somehow within our control. Yet our projects are not simply our creations, since they are also encompassed by the world, and the world is, in at least one important sense, independent of our beliefs and desires. Of course, one might treat the world as itself something presupposed, but to do so would be the same as taking truth to be a sort of ‘project’ (or projection) of a certain, albeit somewhat unusual, kind. ‘Presupposing’ can, after all, be seen as a project of a sort. But truth, insofar as it operates horizontally, cannot be ‘projected’ in this sort of fashion, since truth must itself be presupposed in any such presupposing. The presupposition of truth (if presupposition it is) is thus not part of any project’ or, indeed, of any horizon, since it is tied to the horizontal character of all projects.

The idea that truth is a presuppositional notion appears explicitly in Heidegger’s Being and Time.⁷⁷ Yet Heidegger also recognizes the problematic character of such a presupposition. In answer to the question ‘Why must we presuppose that there is truth?’, Heidegger replies ‘It is not we who presuppose "truth" : but it is "truth" that makes it at all possible ontologically for us to be able to be such that we "presuppose" anything at all. Truth is what makes possible anything like presupposing.’⁷⁸ In this respect truth is not ‘presuppositional’ in the sense of something posited by us – we do not ‘suppose’ truth before

other things. Truth is 'presuppositional' only in the sense that it is ontologically primitive. That is, it can neither be reduced to more primitive notions, nor can it be seen as secondary to any other notion; it stands as the ground for such notions as it is the ground for our very experience of ourselves and the world. It is because it is primitive in this way that truth is 'analytically problematic'. It will always remain opaque to the attempt to analyze it. This is because the attempt to provide an analysis of truth must itself 'presuppose' the notion of truth in much the same way that any attempt to analyze the ultimate horizons of our projects will also be doomed to fail. In the case of truth one could not expect either correspondence or coherence to provide the basis for an adequate analysis of truth, because no such analysis of truth is possible that does not itself already rest upon the very notion it seeks to analyze.⁷⁹

The fact that Heidegger takes up the idea of truth as a presuppositional notion suggests that his work may be a useful source to look to in any attempt to provide a complete account of truth. And Heidegger's thinking has, along with that of Husserl and also Gadamer, been a constant point of reference throughout my discussion and development of the idea of psychological holism. Indeed, Heidegger's conception of truth is itself reflected in, and largely underlies, Gadamer's own account of interpretation⁸⁰ – an account that, as we have seen, offers many interesting parallels with that of Davidson. In invoking Heidegger at this point, however, my aim is not to identify Davidson with Heidegger any more than I have aimed to identify Davidson with Saussure, with Husserl or with Gadamer. Instead the aim is to use Heidegger to suggest how to move beyond the Davidsonian account to provide what that account itself seems to presuppose, and yet does not provide.⁸¹

7.4.2 Heidegger's account of truth as aletheia

Significantly, when we turn to Heidegger, we find an argument concerning the nature of truth that has can be seen to have some interesting parallels with the Davidsonian account. Heidegger identifies the traditional concept of truth in the account of truth as 'correctness', and truth as correctness he sees as traditionally taken up in the notion of correspondence where such correspondence is understood in the minimal sense as a matter of the agreement of knowledge with its object ('adaequatio intellectus et rei').⁸²

Heidegger claims, however, that no correspondence theory can account for truth. Indeed, his rejection of such an account (a rejection qualified by his acceptance that truth can be, and is, understood in

terms of some notion of correspondence or agreement in many ordinary contexts) is largely a rejection of the idea of any representationalist construal of the relation between judgments (or statements) and their objects; we are, instead, always already involved with objects and events within the world (something also reflected in my own discussions). Thus he comments that ‘In “merely knowing” the constitution of any being, in “simply representing” it in my imagination, in “just thinking” about it, I am no less directly with the things of the outer world than when I originally experience them.’⁸³ If one thinks, as do both Heidegger and Davidson, that the relation between ourselves and the things in the world is not a relation in which we confront those things, but one in which we already have access to them, then the correspondence theory of truth is unlikely to seem adequate as a theory of truth. Our primary relation with things is neither confrontational nor representational. Thus, if truth is a feature of our primary encounters with things, truth cannot be primarily a matter of correspondence.

This, of course, leaves open the possibility that our primary encounter with the world might not involve truth at all. That possibility might lead one to suppose that a correspondence account of truth is still available. Yet, as we have already seen, the correspondence account, along with other standard accounts, is incapable of providing a complete account of truth. This provides an independent reason, quite aside from any initial bias we may have against representationalism, for rejecting the correspondence theory, or, at least, for limiting its application. It also illustrates the centrality and irreducibility of the notion of truth with respect to other notions. Thus, for both Davidson and Heidegger (though the matter becomes more complex in Heidegger’s later thinking), the concept of truth has a central role to play in all our involvements with other persons and with things. It is always against a generally ‘true’ background that our projects, whether theoretical or highly practical, are located. What is unclear, however, is what talk of a ‘true’ background means. To talk of truth in this way – in a way that treats truth as a horizontal concept – seemed already, in chapter six, to involve an odd use of truth. One may, indeed, regard talk of truth as ‘horizontal’ to be simply indicative of the odd sense of truth that seems to be required here.

The rejection of representationalism is not tied to the rejection solely of correspondence accounts of truth. It can also be seen as tied to the rejection of coherence accounts of truth, or of any account that treats truth as somehow a subjective, conventional or constructed notion. For what is rejected with representationalism is not merely the relation of representation or confrontation on which it rests, but also

the idea of a subject and object with which it is implicated. So Heidegger comments that ‘the theories of relativism and skepticism spring from a partially justified opposition to an absurd absolutism and dogmatism of the concept of truth, a dogmatism that has its ground in the circumstance that the phenomenon of truth is taken externally as a determination of the subject or of the object.’⁸⁴ Coherence theories of truth, as they treat truth as a matter of the coherence of particular statements or beliefs with a larger body of statements or beliefs, treat truth as a feature of the subject, and as such presuppose the dichotomy between subject and object of which both Davidson and Heidegger are critical.

Heidegger’s rejection of representationalism and of the subject-object dichotomy mirrors Davidson’s own rejection of those notions. In the case of both thinkers, it is a rejection accompanied by a similar rejection of standard accounts of truth. Moreover, in rejecting such accounts both Heidegger and Davidson emphasize the centrality of truth, and its presuppositional character. As presuppositional, truth is tied to the notion of horizontality. This is so as much in Heidegger, and also in Gadamer, as in my own account. A project is structured within a horizon and with respect to some intention. It is, moreover, only within a horizon and with respect to an intention that things themselves can be encountered.⁸⁵ A preliminary characterization of truth, in a horizontal sense, might be in terms of our having access to things as they really are that is, our being able to encounter them. But our having access to things is only possible given the intentional-horizontal structure of projects. Only within that structure can things appear. The appearing of things is just a matter of our being given access to those things within some project. In which case, it seems, truth might be understood in terms of the appearing of things within an intentional-horizontal structure. Such a conception of truth seems to lie behind Heidegger’s comments in a famous passage in Being and Time in which he argues that, in the confirmation of the truth of an assertion:

Representations do not get compared, either among themselves or in relation to the Real Thing. What is to be demonstrated is not an agreement of knowing with its object, still less of the psychical with the physical; but neither is it an agreement between ‘contents of consciousness’ among themselves ... To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ in its uncoveredness. The Being-true (truth) of the assertion must be understood as Being-uncovering. Thus truth has by no means the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the Object).⁸⁶

Such truth cannot, of course, have the structure of agreement in the sense of correspondence, since truth as appearing or 'Being-uncovering' must underlie the possibility of agreement. As we saw earlier, the idea that sentences might correspond to the world or portions of the world, already presupposes that sentences can be distinguished, but this is only possible, on the Davidsonian account, if we already have mostly true beliefs – in other words, if the world is already apparent to us. It is not that such appearing is necessary for us to be able to verify correspondence, but that without it there is nothing with which to correspond.

As both Heidegger and Davidson see matters, neither correspondence nor coherence provide adequate accounts of truth. Yet this does not mean that these notions, or the ideas that underlie them, have no relevance to the concept of truth at all. While truth is not a matter of correspondence or coherence, these ideas can nevertheless be seen as highlighting different aspects of the overall structure within which truth is possible: correspondence takes up the 'intentional' element – the focus of any particular 'project' – while the notion of coherence, which is also a common notion in many discussions of truth, and which, although not so much discussed by Heidegger, does figure in Davidson's account, can be seen as drawing attention to the 'horizontal' element – in the sense that the horizon brings with it requirements of consistency and integration.

Yet as I noted above, if we are to talk of a truth as a horizontal notion, this cannot be taken to mean that truth is a matter of coherence as such. Indeed, the sense in which truth is a horizontal notion is not the sense in which it might involve a sense of coherence. The horizontal character of truth is tied to the way in which truth always inheres in the overall complex of beliefs, and of attitudes, that go to make up the psychological realm. The assertion that 'most of our beliefs' are true is not so much the reporting of a factual claim about the truth value that attaches to each belief we have (indeed, it is hard to make sense of such an idea on the basis of the considerations adduced in the preceding discussion), but rather a claim about the way in which the possibility of any particular instance of truth, and of any particular instance of meaning, is dependent on a larger background of our prior involvement with the world and the events and things that make it up. In this sense, the horizontal character of truth does not concern merely the presence of a consistent and integrated background against which any particular true belief or utterance can be situated (this would be to focus on the element of coherence in the idea of truth), instead truth refers us to

the way in which any particular instance of truth already presupposes that the world, and so specific features of it, is evident to us. Truth as horizontal thus goes beyond mere consistency or integration (even though such notions already direct our attention, to a certain extent, to the horizontal character of truth), but refers to the prior 'truth' of our being already in the world and in relation to the events and things within it. The sense of truth at issue here, as Heidegger indicates, is perhaps more akin to the sense of 'truth' involved in talk of a 'true' friend than of a true sentence – it is a sense in which 'true' means that what is so designated actually shows itself as what it is.⁸⁷ It is precisely because things show themselves in this way that we can make true assertions about them.

The sense of truth that has come into view at this point is one that cannot be separated from the intentional-horizontal structure that has been sketched above, not merely in the sense that the presuppositional character of this sense of truth is indicative of truth as horizontal, but in another sense also. We have already seen that there is a certain dynamic that goes with the structure of any and every project. This dynamic is one that is captured in Davidson's work in the ongoing character of interpretation as a matter of the balancing of different elements against one another; it is evident in Gadamer's work in the idea of interpretation as always 'dialogical' or 'conversational'; it is also evident in Heidegger in a conception of truth as 'happening' in a constant process of revealing and concealing.⁸⁸

Truth is, for Heidegger, the appearing or disclosing of things within a horizontal setting. It is thus properly, in the original Greek, aletheia ('un-hiddenness' or 'un-covering' in Heidegger's reading – Unverborgenheit⁸⁹). Truth is not identified with any horizon, nor with any 'intention', but with the very occurrence of the horizon, its 'opening up', such that things appear or are disclosed. Of course, as truth is the opening up of the horizon, so it is also associated with possibilities being closed off. In this respect, every unconcealing is also a concealing, and the opening up of things is never an opening into total transparency.⁹⁰ Thus, although it is indeed the world itself that is revealed in this way, it is always a certain ordering of things within the world that is thereby made salient. Indeed, the revealing that is truth occurs always in respect of some specific thing and it is as other things are related to that which is the focus that the relational whole that is the world can also, though always incompletely, come into view. Truth is thus taken to be identical with the revealing of things, but such revealing is itself a process of revealing and

concealing, and it is precisely in the interplay of such revealing and concealing that truth itself, namely revealing as such, arises.

Heidegger treats this idea of truth as aletheia as underlying other senses of truth. In this respect, Heidegger does not reject the idea of truth as correspondence, but rather sees it as merely inadequate as an account of truth and as underlain by the notion of truth as aletheia. Thus Joseph Kockelmans writes that:

...in Heidegger's view, the traditional correspondence theory of truth' is neither false nor trivial. The conception according to which truth is the correspondence between man's knowledge and its object is correct and important. And similar remarks can be made for the other theories about truth, namely, the coherence theory and the pragmatic theory of truth. Yet, Heidegger argues, these theories tell us relatively little about the very essence of truth, about that which makes correspondence, coherence, and correctness precisely possible as such.⁹¹

Of course, the sense of correspondence that is invoked here is not a notion that carries a great deal of content with it – it is little more than the intuition Davidson describes when he says that, as I quoted above, 'in characterizing truth for a language it is necessary to put words into relation with objects.'⁹² The crucial point is that Heidegger's commitment to the notion of truth as aletheia is not a commitment to some subjectivist or anti-realist conception, but is instead a rejection of the idea that truth can be understood on the basis merely of notions such as correspondence, coherence or whatever. Such views of truth do, in fact, assume a notion of truth rather than providing a complete explication of it. Indeed, what they assume, but do not make explicit, is the original access to things that is given in their appearance within the horizontal setting in which they are opened up to us.

Heidegger is fond of talking of the intimate belonging together of truth and untruth – of unconcealing and concealing. This is not only a reflection of truth as the unconcealing-concealing of the things within an overall horizon (while truth is revealing or unconcealing, it is not just that, since every revealing is also, it should be noted, a concealing), but it also indicates the way in which the event of truth is, for Heidegger, itself utterly mysterious and hidden. While Heidegger grounds the usual notions of truth in the idea of truth as opening, that opening is itself not accessible to further analysis in any sense that would reduce such opening to any more primitive notion.⁹³ It is, in fact, the ground for the possibility of analysis. Thus truth is indeed 'analytically problematic', as we saw above, because it resists any attempt at

elucidation or reduction. The problem of providing an analysis of truth is, in this sense, not a problem that disappears by being finally solved. Instead, the problem itself must be seen as arising out of a demand for an 'account' of truth that is inappropriate to the nature of truth itself.

Although the idea of truth as aletheia might at first sight seem alien to the Davidsonian account, it is, in fact, suggested in the very methodology employed by Davidson. It is a methodology in which understanding develops through our dialogue and involvement with other speakers and entities within the world. Aletheia is the event of opening up – of freeing up – that makes such dialogic interaction, within which understanding arises, possible. Dialogue presupposes the opening up, or freeing up, of possibilities and is thus itself constituted as 'truthful', not only in that it can give rise to truth as correspondence or as coherence, but in that dialogue is itself constituted as a constant process in which different elements are played off one against the other – in which new possibilities of meaning are constantly revealed and others concealed. Our very access to the world, to others and to ourselves, is constituted through this dialogue of understanding. Indeed, the self-evidence of our experience and understanding of things – that things are evident to us as thus and so – is founded in the constant interplay between different such experiences and understandings that can itself be observed in the structure of interpretative dialogue. Inasmuch as truth can indeed be understood as the very self-evidence of things – although it is a self-evidence that is always being 'worked out' – then it is only on the basis of such self-evidence that particular sentences and beliefs can be true or false, that is, that they can be more or less adequate to their objects.

7.4.3 The identification of 'opening' with truth

This way of treating truth as fundamentally an event of 'opening up' that involves the revealing and concealing of things is clearly very different from most traditional approaches to the notion. It does indeed involve a shift, a radical shift, in our orientation (a shift in orientation adumbrated in my earlier discussion of skepticism §6.3.4). Of course so radical is this shift that one may well wonder why we should use the term 'truth' to refer to this fundamental opening. Why call this opening, this unconcealing-revealing, truth? Why should we even pay attention to such opening?

In fact, while the idea of truth as opening might appear radical and unusual, it is not entirely without precedents in the use of the notion of truth in ordinary language. Truth is not usually talked of in

terms of opening', but, as I noted above, there are uses of 'truth' and 'true' that take them out of their usual propositional contexts: uses such as are involved in talk of a true friend or true gold or 'being true to one's beliefs'. Such talk of truth, which assimilates truth to genuineness, may be thought to be largely metaphorical, but it nevertheless suggests the idea of things showing themselves for what they are – of their real natures being open to us – and it is this direction that Heidegger follows in his notion of truth as aletheia. Moreover, there also seems to be a use of truth, again, perhaps, metaphorical, in which truth is used to signify a vision of the whole picture. 'Ah! I see it all now! Now I understand the truth of it, may indicate that we have finally grasped some proposition or propositions that accurately express a certain state of affairs, but, more often than not, we mean that we now see how things fit together in a way that we could not completely express in any specific statement or set of statements. Such talk of truth is, perhaps, less common among philosophers than among poets and artists, though it is also not unknown among practitioners of other disciplines (it is particularly important in, for instance, psychoanalytic thinking). Certainly it is a use of truth that we find employed in practical as well as theoretical contexts. Such talk may not fit easily into the usual philosophical accounts of truth, but that in itself should be no reason for disregarding it. It is certainly an interesting use, from my own and from the Heideggerian perspective, since it suggests a sense in which truth is tied fairly directly to the grasp of a larger framework (horizon) within which particulars make sense or have significance.

Heidegger himself emphasized, in Being and Time, that his account of truth as aletheia was merely a reappropriation of a more original notion of truth. Thus he comments that 'while our definition is seemingly arbitrary, it contains only the necessary Interpretation of what was primordially surmised in the oldest tradition of ancient philosophy... In proposing our "definition" of "truth" we have not shaken off the tradition but we have appropriated it primordially.'⁹⁴ My argument in these pages for the relevance of the Heideggerian notion of aletheia to the account of truth has not, however, depended on any claims about the place of that notion within the philosophical tradition or its meaning in ordinary language. Instead, it is based in my holistic reading of Davidson, and in the attempt to elucidate the horizontal notion of truth which that reading seems to require. The idea of truth as opening thus arises out of my attempt to provide a more integrated account of the holism that is to be found in Davidson's account of interpretation. It is not a totally arbitrary imposition on that account.

Recognition of the need to conceive of truth in a more fundamental way arises most clearly out of consideration of the traditional theories of truth in the light of Davidsonian holism. We have already seen the impossibility of providing an account of the notion of truth that does not itself rely on some prior notion of being true. Correspondence, coherence, even pragmatism, can provide no account of truth as such. Davidson's use of Tarski, while it is often taken to embody a correspondence account of truth, itself relies on a notion of truth, rather than providing any fundamental explication of the notion. The Tarskian account relies on interpreters' prior grasp of the concept of truth as it is embedded in their understanding of their own language. That grasp of truth as it operates in language is, moreover, itself embedded in our understanding of the world. Thus Davidson claims that knowing a language – knowing a truth theory – cannot be distinguished from knowing our way around the world in general. An understanding of truth is also, therefore, an understanding of the world. If this seems a strange thing to say, it nevertheless makes good sense in Heideggerian terms. For the understanding involved here can be seen as really that pre-understanding that is the original opening or unconcealment of things that is the ground of our experience and understanding of objects.

The notion of truth plays a central part in our conception of interpretation, understanding and the nature of the psychological itself. Davidson's emphasis on the role of the principle of charity and on the necessary veridicality of belief ('most of our beliefs are true') seems, moreover, to require a notion of truth that cannot be expressed in terms of the usual accounts of truth. It even suggests a notion of truth according to which truth is not simply a property of particular sentences. In its broadest sense charity can itself be read as a principle that asserts the dependence of meaning on truth. Truth makes meaning possible in the sense that it is against a largely truthful background that anything (including any belief) can appear.⁹⁵ It is this idea that would seem to lie behind Davidson's, now abandoned, slogan that truth as coherence (truth conceived in terms of the integration of the psychological) makes possible truth as correspondence (truth as correctness in relation to the objects judged). But such 'coherence', as well as 'correspondence', is grounded in a prior notion of truth. My suggestion, following Heidegger, is that it can only be grounded in a conception of truth as the opening that allows things to appear within a horizon that is the fundamental ground for all meaningfulness. Meaning, we might say, is thus constituted in the event of truth. This is

because truth represents the possibility of the appearance of things and, co-relative with this, of their integration within the overall horizon. Meaningfulness is primarily a matter of such integrated appearing.

The examination of Davidson's holistic account of interpretation thus drives us towards the conclusion that truth must somehow be seen to inhere in the broader and never completely determinable horizon within which projects are located. Yet one cannot make sense of such a possibility if truth is understood simply as a property of sentences or propositions. Such a possibility goes beyond a conception of truth as either correspondence or coherence. It is the attempt to understand truth in this horizontal fashion that leads, inevitably, to Heidegger. For with Heidegger we get some indication of what such a horizontal conception of truth might amount to. Truth cannot be identical with the horizon (neither the world-horizon nor any particular horizon); it cannot consist merely in the unity of the horizon nor in the intending of the object within the horizon. Instead, truth can only be understood as the opening that takes place in horizontality by which things can appear within the horizon, an opening that is prior to any intending of an object. The understanding of truth in terms of the opening of the horizon is thus not arbitrary, but arises out of the attempt to follow through the problems presented in the notion of charity, in the notion of truth as correspondence and coherence and in the way in which truth resides always in the background of the interpretative project itself and so is implicated in the notion of psychological holism itself.

Heidegger's account of truth thus provides an important way of elaborating on the horizontal character of truth that seems to be implied by the Davidsonian account. However, Davidson's own analysis of truth, specifically his arguments to show that no 'theory' of truth can be adequate as an account of truth as such, but must always rely upon a prior grasp of truth, together with his claim that truth always inheres in our beliefs as a whole, can be seen as providing support for the Heideggerian account. Indeed, Davidson's arguments could well be employed to counter the objections to the Heideggerian view of truth that were famously advanced by Ernst Tugendhat,⁹⁶ and could also be seen as providing reasons for maintaining the identification (which, in his later thinking, Heidegger abandoned⁹⁷) of aletheia or 'unconcealment' with truth.

By now it will, of course, have become very clear how much my rereading of Davidson – my attempt to retrieve an integrated Davidsonian position – has in fact resulted in a transformation of that position. Indeed, it may even be said that while I have ostensibly been discussing Davidson I have really

been involved in subtly shifting the entire context of discussion from the original Davidsonian problematic to a new and very different problematic of my own. Certainly I will admit that I have, perhaps, attempted something of a paradigm shift in the course of my discussion. Yet I think that the shift, if there is one, is nevertheless grounded in the original Davidsonian approach. It grows out of that approach rather than being simply established alongside it. In this respect, it attempts to enlarge the Davidsonian horizon rather than completely supplant it with something new. Here is the hermeneutic circle that I alluded to in my introduction to this book. Indeed, not only does the problem of truth make clear this hermeneutical element in my approach, but it also makes clear that what I have done here is to develop the original Davidsonian position in a way that gives it a more properly ontological and hermeneutical dimension. This move is particularly important when it comes to the discussion of truth because, as truth is analytically problematic, so the pursuit of the inquiry into truth must involve a shift in approach away from the method of strict analysis as it is often understood. Such a shift is already implicit in much of my discussion in previous chapters, particularly in my employment of explicitly phenomenological and hermeneutical ideas and themes.

Since my account of truth as a horizontal notion is properly a hermeneutic account – it attempts to interpret truth rather than merely to analyze it – one would expect that other interpretations of truth as horizontal would also be possible. Certainly it will always be possible to articulate this fundamental concept of truth in other ways. I can make no claim for the necessity of the particular way in which, following Heidegger, I have tried to articulate the matter here. Heidegger himself would point to the historicity of any such attempt. We might also look to the hermeneutical indeterminacy that will affect such a project. But, in addition, the attempt to say something about truth in this fundamental, horizontal sense will always be open to being attempted anew – to reformulation and repetition – because of its horizontal character. Trying to talk about truth in this sense is always like groping in the dark for what lies at the very limits of our reach. The difficulty of this attempt does not, I think, mean that the attempt is not worthwhile, for what it tries to grasp is something that is difficult only because it is so fundamental.⁹⁸

7.4.4 'Naïve' realism and the 'event' of truth

I began the discussion in this chapter with a consideration of Davidson's position in regard to the contemporary dispute between realism and anti-realism. To some extent this dispute is one that, from a holistic point of view, is ill conceived. Both metaphysical realism and anti-realism can be taken as coherent positions, but only when they are understood as having a limited and local application: within any particular, and therefore, local, horizon we can think of the world as independent of the particular project in which we are engaged, and we can also see how any local horizon is constituted, in large part, through human practices. Of course, on this construal metaphysical realism and anti-realism need not come into conflict. Metaphysical realism and anti-realism are incompatible, however, when viewed as global (or, perhaps, in Heideggerian terminology, as 'ontological') accounts – which is how they are usually intended – and understood in this way they also fail to constitute coherent positions. Moreover, to the extent that the dispute between realism and anti-realism rests largely on a mistaken dichotomy (between language and reality, belief and world, subject and object), we can also see how the problem of realism, as usually understood, is largely a problem to be overcome, rather than resolved.

I have, of course, presented the Davidsonian position as a realist one, even though it embodies a rather unusual version of realism – what I have called a 'horizontal' realism (a realism that I take as quite distinct from the 'realism' Davidson explicitly rejects and that he says is 'just the ontological version of a correspondence theory'⁹⁹). The reason for taking Davidson as a realist is not that he has occasionally claimed the title for himself, but because of the central role he accords to truth and the world. Indeed, Davidson's own comments on the matter aside, it seems that we can even attach some meaning to the idea of the 'independence' of the world, in just the sense there is always more to the world than is given in our projects, taken singly or together, and those projects can never exhaust the world. Insofar as Davidson does remain a 'realist' in this, admittedly very specific, sense, so Robert Dostal has taken him to be allied with Gadamer, against Derrida, on the issue of the role of truth and the notion of objectivity.¹⁰⁰ Dostal, however, treats Davidson as something of a 'naive' realist (as Sean Sayers also does¹⁰¹) since Dostal claims that Davidson rejects the idea of a common world and argues instead for our unmediated contact with the world. Here Dostal seems to me to have failed to understand the substance of the Davidsonian position that lies beneath the Davidsonian rhetoric.

Davidson's rejection of the idea that there is a 'single space' within which all schemes can be commensurated is not the rejection of a common world, but the rejection of the idea that our contact with reality is a matter of confrontation between subjective and objective components. It is a rejection of the idea that there is a single scheme that encompasses all schemes, a single content to which all schemes refer, not merely because of the difficulty in making sense of such a notion (a difficulty that is apparent as soon as one asks what the relevant content here could be, or just what scheme one might have in mind and how that scheme, or that content, is to be characterized and identified), but because the notion is objectionable in the same way that any other version of the scheme/content dichotomy is objectionable – because the very idea of any generalized distinction between scheme and content is incoherent. In the terms I have articulated here, such a distinction violates the holism of the psychological as such.

Naivety carries with it the idea of a certain simplicity and openness. Davidson's realism is not naïve in assuming some unmediated contact between subject and object, since there are not two things to be brought into contact in this way or any way. Yet maybe one could say that Davidsonian realism is 'naïve' in another sense, a sense that indicates how much the notion of realism (along with the notion of truth) may have been transformed within the Davidsonian account itself. It is naïve because it relies upon the possibility of a primitive, 'simple', 'happening' that grounds the appearing of things as real – the happening that is the simple encounter with things, that is our 'being there'. That happening is what I have called, taking my cue from Heidegger, the happening of truth. Insofar as it grounds the possibility of appearance, that happening is nevertheless not itself open to further analysis or scrutiny, but instead makes all such scrutinizing possible. Consequently my account here can be taken as one that shows how commitment to such a 'naïve' – simple – realism is unavoidable and necessary. The prior opening of the world – while inexplicable in itself – is nevertheless the ground for the possibility of all our discourse and all our experience of things, and yet is something merely given to us.¹⁰² In this respect, both Heidegger and, on my account, Davidson, are indeed simple, 'naïve' realists. – although I must emphasize the somewhat idiosyncratic use to which I am putting the term 'realism.' The prior opening that makes possible the appearance of things, and so can be taken as making possible 'reality' itself, is something both simple and unsophisticated – it is indeed prior to and the ground for any sophistication.¹⁰³

The idea of this sort of realism as 'naïve' is something that can, I think, be fruitfully pursued a little further here.¹⁰⁴ For there is surely a sense in which what lies behind Heidegger's talk of truth as aletheia, what certainly lies behind my own appropriation of that talk, and what seems also to lie behind Davidson's emphasis on our 'unmediated' involvement with the world, is the simple (and therefore, perhaps, 'naïve') recognition of the way in which the world opens up to us – is indeed always open to us beforehand. This is not some especially esoteric or exotic occurrence (although it may take on a mystical air), but an occurrence that is part of the everyday. To give recognition to this event of 'open-ness' is simply to give recognition to the fact of our being 'in' the world – a world of richness and variety, of darkness and light, a world that is open to us in the earth beneath our feet and the sky above our heads, in those others whom we encounter before and around us. It is an experience of the world as world – as a place wherein we find ourselves, that bounds and constrains and that also involves and engages us. It is this 'truthful' experience that is the ground for all that we do and think and feel. To put matters thus is to put them in a way stripped of complexity – perhaps so stripped that it necessarily fails to take account of the complexities that are also involved. Maybe this does embody a 'naïve' form of realism; maybe it remains 'naïve' even when the subtleties and complexities are taken account of; maybe it is so 'naïve' that it has ceased to be philosophical. Still I think that it is to this recognition that Heidegger and, on my account, Davidson, return us. One may argue that the recognition at issue here is not a recognition of truth, but rather of the conditions that make truth possible, but however we choose to describe matters, it is a recognition that turns us back towards what Heidegger would talk of as the experience of being, but not in the sense of inaugurating some mystical communion with a Reality beyond, but in the simple opening up of the world in the everyday, in the mundane, in the ordinary. Insofar as this 'experience' is one to which we are indeed 'returned', then although that experience, and the 'naïve' realism associated with it, can be seen to underlie the Heideggerian and Davidsonian positions, such experience and such realism cannot be regarded as an assumption of those positions. Rather we are returned to it – 'reminded' of it – through a process of argument and reflection. Mention of such realism can thus come only at the very end of a book such as this – I could not have begun with it – although recognition of it may provide the starting point to begin anew.

Davidson's realism, whether 'naïve' or not, is nevertheless not unproblematic, since its basic presuppositions seem not to be explicitly articulated by Davidson himself. Part of my task here has been to attempt some such articulation (although the sort of basic experience I alluded to immediately above can never be given complete articulation – but neither should such completeness be expected). In the process it becomes very clear that Davidsonian realism is not realism in the sense that the term has been used by Nagel, Putnam, Dummett or most other philosophers within the analytic tradition. It is realist, not in asserting the existence of some determinate reality independent of us and perhaps even unknowable by us, but insofar as it reaffirms our place within the world, and reaffirms the centrality and primacy of truth itself. Such realism is not 'naïve' in any simple-minded sense. Nor is it either internal or metaphysical. It is rather the realism that is firmly embedded in all our talk and action, and which is grounded in the circumstances of interpretation. It is a realism that shows itself in the mirror of meaning.

Epilogue: Davidson, Brandom and McDowell

[This section is still to be written]

Notes and references

Notes to Foreword

¹ See my comments on Bilgrami in ‘Unity, Locality and Agency: Bilgrami on Belief and Meaning’, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 58 (1998), pp.1-7.

² Fodor and LePore’s discussion is extremely circumscribed in its approach. It does not aim to demonstrate the falsity of what Fodor and LePore refer to as ‘meaning holism’, but only that: ‘none of the arguments for meaning holism that we’ve heard about so far or that we’ve been able to reconstruct from the discussions of arguments for meaning holism that we’ve heard about so far is actually sound’, Holism: A Shopper’s Guide (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.x. The book actually focuses primarily on holism as a semantic thesis, and the discussion of Davidson is oddly skewed by some rather peculiar misreadings of the Davidsonian position. On this, see Davidson’s reply to another piece by Fodor and LePore in ‘Radical Interpretation Interpreted’, Philosophical Perspectives 8 (1994), pp.121-8. Ernest LePore’s more recent work, particularly his collaborations with Kirk Ludwig, has remained antipathetic to the holistic elements in Davidson’s work, and has been extremely critical of Davidson’s thinking beyond the earlier, more technically focussed writings – see Lepore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth Language, and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ ‘Reply to Simon J. Evnine’, in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), p.307. The arguments that I set out in the pages that follow ought to indicate why I think that, in making such a characterization, Davidson seems actually to underplay the real nature and significance of holism. It seems to me a mistake to put much emphasis on this relatively isolated comment, however, especially given that elsewhere Davidson presents the holism thesis in a way that makes it seem much more significant – see, for instance, ‘The Problem of Objectivity’, Tijdschrift voor Filosofie (1995), pp.203-20.

¹ Since this book first appeared, Mark Wrathall has discussed the relation between Davidson and Heidegger on truth in his ‘The Conditions of Truth in Heidegger and Davidson’, The Monist (1999), pp.304-23;

see also Karsten R. Stueber, 'Understanding Truth and Objectivity: A Dialogue Between Donald Davidson and Hans-Georg Gadamer' in Brice R. Wachterhauser (ed.), Hermeneutics and Truth (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), pp.172-89. Even prior to my own work, however, Mark Okrent, while not focusing specifically on the account of truth, nevertheless argued for a 'pragmatist' reading of Heidegger that brought Heidegger into close proximity with both Quine and Davidson on a number of crucial points – see Mark Okrent, Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding Being and the Critique of Metaphysics (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), especially pp.293-4. Since then Okrent has focused specifically on the relation between Davidson and Heidegger on truth in 'XXXX' in Jeff Malpas (ed.), *Dialogues with Davidson* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011). Okrent, as well as Davidson, participated in a summer seminar series held at the University of California at Santa Cruz in mid-1990 under the title 'Davidson and Heidegger: Critics of Cartesianism'. Davidson himself viewed the seminar as doing little to advance understanding of his views as they might relate to Heidegger's, but from my own perspective it was interesting to note the absence of the problem of truth from the list of topics to be discussed. Richard Rorty has, of course, been notable for his own treatment of Davidson and Heidegger (as well as of Dewey, Nietzsche, Foucault and others) as thinkers who have broken with what Rorty calls the 'representationalist' problematic. See, for instance Rorty, Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

² See, for instance, Bjørn Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp.139-41; Karsten R. Stueber, 'Understanding Truth and Objectivity: A Dialogue Between Donald Davidson and Hans-Georg Gadamer'; David C. Hoy, 'Post-Cartesian Interpretation: Hans-Georg Gadamer and Donald Davidson', in The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Library of Living Philosophers XXIV (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), pp.110-128. But note also Pascal Engel's dissenting view in 'Interpretation Without Hermeneutics: A Plea Against Ecumenism', Topoi 10 (1991), pp.137-46.

³ This is a point that I first attempted to elaborate in 'Analysis and Hermeneutics', Philosophy and Rhetoric 25 (1992), pp.93-123.

⁴ Over the last ten years of his life, Davidson wrote a great deal that took up the idea of holism more explicitly, but he did not attempt to provide the sort of systematic account that I have tried to provide here. Indeed, given that, as I note in the Foreword above, he sometimes seemed to present holism as a fairly restricted thesis, such a systematic account is unlikely to be found in Davidson's own work.

⁵ 'Preface to the First Edition', The World as Will and Representation, Vol I, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p.xii. Schopenhauer 's prefatory comments concerning how his book is to be read emphasize the holistic unity of his own thought and thus his primary advice to his readers is 'to read the book twice' (p.xiii).

⁶ For more on 'hermeneutic' methodology, see my 'Analysis and Hermeneutics'.

⁷ Umberto Eco, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.207. See also Gadamer's comment: 'The mirror image is essentially connected, through the medium of the observer, with the proper vision of the thing' (Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [New York: Crossroad, 2nd, rev edn., 1989], p.466).

⁸ See Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Notes to Chapter One

¹ Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960.

² 'The Nature of Natural Knowledge', in Samuel Guttenplan (ed), Mind and Language (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.68.

³ See 'Epistemology Naturalized', in Ontological Relativity and Other Essays (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp.69-90. The attempt to find a certain basis for knowledge is, of course, closely tied to the attempt to refute epistemological skepticism. But while Quine argues explicitly for the abandonment of the quest for epistemological certainty, he does not seem entirely to give up on the attempt to answer the skeptic – see 'The Nature of Natural Knowledge', pp.67-8 and 'Reply to Stroud', in P. A. French, T. E. Uehling and H. K. Wettstein (eds.), Midwest Studies in Philosophy 6: The Foundations of Analytic Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p.475.

⁴ 'Epistemology Naturalized', pp.82-3.

⁵ Word and Object, p.26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.27

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁸ Attributed to James Grier Miller at the beginning of Word and Object.

⁹ Thus semantics can indeed be seen as identical with epistemology – see ‘Epistemology Naturalized’, p.89

¹⁰ Word and Object, p.28.

¹¹ Although Davidson claims, as we shall see below (§2.1.1), that our prior linguistic knowledge is always implicated in interpretation, in the sense that interpretation always presupposes our mastery of a truth theory for our own language

¹² ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, Journal of Philosophy, 87 (1990), p.324.

¹³ Word and Object, p.27.

¹⁴ Quine, ‘Indeterminacy of Translation Again’, Journal of Philosophy, 84 (1987), p.5. John Searle is one critic who has taken just this view. See ‘Indeterminacy, Empiricism and the First Person’, Journal of Philosophy, 84 (1987), pp.123-6.

¹⁵ ‘Indeterminacy of Translation Again’, p.5.

¹⁶ Word and Object, pp.31-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.38

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

²⁰ ‘Meaning and Experience’, in Guttenplan (ed.), Mind and Language, pp.29-30.

²¹ In From a Logical Point of View (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp.20-46.

²² ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, pp.42-3.

²³ ‘On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation’, Journal of Philosophy, 67 (1970), pp.178-83.

²⁴ See Føllesdal’s account of the distinction between indeterminacy and underdetermination in ‘Meaning and Experience’, pp.32-3. Both Noam Chomsky and Richard Rorty have taken issue with the original Quinean distinction. See Noam Chomsky, ‘Quine’s Empirical Assumptions’, in Donald Davidson and Jaakko Hintikka (eds.), Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine (Dordrecht:

D. Reidel, 1969), pp.53-68; and also Richard Rorty, 'Indeterminacy of Translation and of Truth', Synthese, 23 (1972), pp.443-62.

²⁵ 'Meaning and Experience', p.30

²⁶ This is already to presage the Davidsonian account of the inseparability of meaning and information as the interdependence of meaning and belief.

²⁷ At the very least, any utterance will be indicative of; and embedded in, some specific set of beliefs – even utterances that are taken to be purely 'expressive', in the sense of expressing some emotional or subjective response. Such responses presuppose beliefs about what is being responded to. Of course, that the identification of beliefs is a necessary part of the interpretation of utterances leaves open the possibility that more might also be involved here.

²⁸ As he emphasizes in the exchange with Noam Chomsky, in Davidson and Hintikka (eds.), Word and Objections, pp.303-4

²⁹ The claim that indeterminacy arises out of a basic holism in Quine and, more particularly, that it arises out of the inseparability of meaning from belief; might nevertheless be disputed. See, for instance, Robert Kirk, Translation Determined (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). While Kirk denies that the inseparability thesis can give support to the indeterminacy, he also seems to misconstrue the nature of that thesis. The inseparability thesis is the claim that meanings cannot be clearly separated from beliefs. Thus, in the process of translation, the behavioral and other facts will only determine meanings in conjunction with beliefs. So all translations will be dependent on, and sensitive to, a background of belief attributions. Equally, attributions of belief will be dependent on, and sensitive to, some background theory of translation. It is such interdependence that gives rise to indeterminacy.

³⁰ Word and Object, p.66.

³¹ This summary of results appears *ibid.*, p.68.

³² 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', in Subjective, p.149.

³³ Originally in the work of N. L. Wilson, 'Substances Without Substrata', Review of Metaphysics, 12 (1959), p.532; also in his 'Grice on Meaning: The Ultimate Counter-Example', Nous, 4 (1970), p.300.

³⁴ Word and Object, pp.57-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.58.

³⁶ See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Primitive Mentality, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923).

³⁷ Word and Object, p.59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁴³ 'Introduction', Inquiries, p.xix.

⁴⁴ Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, p.13 – see also p.82 and p.95 n. 1.

⁴⁵ Davidson himself makes this quite clear in 'Meaning, Truth and Evidence', in Robert B. Barrett and Roger F. Gibson (eds.), Perspectives on Quine (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp.68-79. The difference between Quine and Davidson on the question of the justification of beliefs is something I discuss further in chapter six (§6.3.2).

⁴⁶ See 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', Inquiries, pp.183-98; Davidson refers to the distinction as the 'third dogma' on p.189.

⁴⁷ See Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.136 n. 16.

Notes to Chapter Two

¹ 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.126 n. 1.

² *Ibid.*, see also p.136 n. 16.

³ *Ibid.*, p.126. See also 'Introduction', Inquiries, p.xv

⁴ See Davidson, 'Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages', Inquiries, pp.3-15.

⁵ 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.130.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Davidson, 'Psychology as Philosophy: Comments and Replies', Essays, p.243.

⁸ As H.-G. Gadamer claims, Truth and Method, p.384.

⁹ 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.129 n. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma', in Theories and Things (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.38

¹² Tarski, 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages', in Logic, Semantics and Metamathematics, trans. J. R. Woodger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp.152-278.

¹³ See Davidson, 'Semantics for Natural Languages', Inquiries, p.57.

¹⁴ For a brief discussion of the use/mention distinction see Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp 34-5

¹⁵ Tarski, 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages', p.189.

¹⁶ For Tarski's original account see 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages', but for a more accessible and non-technical account see 'Truth and Proof', Scientific American, 220 (1967), pp.63-73, or 'The Semantic Conception of Truth', in Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars (eds.), Readings in Philosophical Analysis (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1949), pp.52-84. For an introductory account of the Tarskian project, particularly in relation to Davidson, see Mark Platts, Ways of Meaning (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp.18-33.

¹⁷ 'Introduction', Inquiries, p.xvi

¹⁸ Davidson describes this 'bold' solution thus: 'try treating the position occupied by "p" extensionally: to implement this, sweep away the obscure "means that", provide the sentence that replaces "p" with a proper sentential connective and supply the description that replaces "s" with its own predicate. The plausible result is "s is T if and only if p"' ('Truth and Meaning', Inquiries, p.23).

¹⁹ See Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning', Inquiries, pp.2-34.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.17-36; see also 'Semantics for Natural Languages', Inquiries, pp.55-64, 'In Defence of Convention T', Inquiries, pp.65-75 and Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, p.7.

²¹ 'Truth and Meaning', Inquiries, p.24.

²² 'On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name', Mind, 86 (1977), pp.159-60.

²³ It should be noted that although a theory of meaning will take the form of a theory of truth, not every theory of truth will be adequate as a theory of meaning. See McDowell, 'On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name', pp.160-1; also Evans and McDowell, 'Editorial Introduction', in Gareth Evans and

John McDowell (eds.), Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp.xiii-xviii.

²⁴ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.300.

²⁵ See Davidson's discussion, *ibid.*, where it becomes clear that the elaboration of the theory of radical interpretation, in which Davidson sets out the interconnections between concepts of truth, belief; meaning and so forth, is itself an elaboration of the structure of truth.

²⁶ Davidson sets out his approach to semantics in the essays in the first part of Inquiries, Essays 1-5. For a view which is highly critical of Davidson, see Jonathan Bennett, 'Critical Notice: Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation', Mind, 96 (1985), pp.601-26. Bennett writes that 'Re-reading and thinking about these papers [in Inquiries] has not dislodged my ancient opinion that Davidson's approach to meaning is inferior to that of Grice's papers and the books by Schiffer and myself', 'Critical Notice', p.626. I discuss the Gricean position briefly in 3.2.3 below. Bjørn Ramberg defends the Davidsonian approach in Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, especially chapters 3-5, pp.16ff. For arguments both for and against Davidsonian semantics, see some of the essays in Evans and McDowell (eds.), Truth and Meaning, particularly Gareth Evans and John McDowell's 'Introduction', pp.vii-xxiii.

²⁷ As Reinar Schürmann suggests Heidegger must also be read; see Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy, trans. Christine Marie-Gros, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.13.

²⁸ 'In Defence of Convention T', Inquiries, p.75.

²⁹ See, for instance, Devitt and Sterelny, Language and Reality, p.243.

³⁰ A similar view is also set forth by Louise Antony, 'Anomalous Monism and the Problem of Explanatory Force', Philosophical Review, 98 (1989), pp.17-83.

³¹ See H.P. Grice, 'Meaning', Philosophical Review, 78 (1957), pp.377-88; also Stephen Schiffer, Meaning (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) and Jonathan Bennett, Linguistic Behavior (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

³² See Michael Devitt, Designation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

³³ 'Reality Without Reference', Inquiries, p.219. Here Davidson discusses the objection that a theory of truth is not sufficient to provide a theory of meaning, and that what is needed is a theory of reference.

He also develops a general argument against any 'building-block' approach to the theory of meaning, see especially pp.221-5. See also Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.16-36.

³⁴ Thus Davidson comments that 'This conception of how to do theory of meaning is essentially Quine's.

What I have added to Quine's basic insight is the suggestion that the theory should take the form of a theory of absolute truth', 'Reality Without Reference', Inquiries, p.225. In the light of Davidson's later incorporation of desire into the picture, one might say that there are actually three paired concepts at issue here: truth and meaning; meaning and belief; and belief and desire. The latter pairing is one that Davidson attributes to Frank Ramsey.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, pp.215-25, especially pp.218-19.

³⁶ 'The Semantic Conception of Truth', p.58.

³⁷ It is worth noting that Tarski goes on, in the passage quoted above, to clarify what he means by talk of a solution whose character is 'approximate': 'Roughly speaking, the approximation consists in replacing a natural language (or a portion of it in which we are interested) by one whose structure is exactly specified, and which diverges from the given language "as little as possible"' ('The Semantic Conception of Truth', p.58).

³⁸ 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', Inquiries, p.204. See Gareth Evans, 'Identity and Predication', Journal of Philosophy, 72 (1975), p.346. Davidson also discusses the possible difficulties in applying Tarski to natural languages in 'Truth and Meaning', Inquiries, pp.28ff, and 'Semantics for Natural Languages', Inquiries, pp.59-60. See also Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.49-54.

³⁹ See Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in LePore, Ernest and McLaughlin, Brian, (eds.), Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) pp.433-46.

⁴⁰ Conventions may facilitate understanding, but they cannot play any significant role in making it possible. See Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs'; also 'Communication and Convention', Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, pp.265-80 and 'The Social Aspect of Language', in B. McGuinness and G. Oliveri (eds.), The Philosophy of Michael Dummett (Dordrecht: Kluwer 1994), pp.1-16.

⁴¹ For instance: that the translating sentence be one that we would ourselves use in the same circumstances

in which native speakers of the object language use the object language sentence. See Graham MacDonald and Philip Pettit, Semantics and Social Science (London: Routledge, 1981), p.9.

⁴² Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.60-2.

⁴³ See 'Truth and Meaning', p.26, esp. n.10.

⁴⁴ Quine, 'Comment on Donald Davidson', Synthese, 27 (1974), p.325.

⁴⁵ 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, p.146. See also 'A New Basis for Decision Theory', Theory and Decision, 18 (1985), p.87-98.

⁴⁶ 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', Inquiries, p.200.

⁴⁷ 'The Inscrutability of Reference', Inquiries, pp.240-1; see 'Truth and Meaning', Inquiries, p.27, where this connection is also made and charity implicated.

⁴⁸ See 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, p.153.

⁴⁹ 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, p.153.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.154.

⁵¹ See 'Reality Without Reference', Inquiries, pp.224-5, 'What is Present to the Mind?', Subjective, p.65; 'Indeterminism and Antirealism', Subjective, pp.75-6.

⁵² As a result he also seems to collapse or at least to ignore the Quinean distinction between indeterminacy and under-determination.

⁵³ 'Reply to Rorty', in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, p.596. See also 'Indeterminism and Anti-Realism', Subjective, p.75 and 'Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers', in Peter Kotatko, Peter Pagin and Gabriel Segal (eds.), Interpreting Davidson (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2001), pp.297-300.

⁵⁴ It is this sort of indeterminacy or multiplicity of description that seems to be an important element in Davidson's anomalous monism. Anomalous monism can be characterized as the view that, with respect to a large class of events (if not all), there is always more than one vocabulary within which those events can be correctly described – thus events can be described in a vocabulary that employs mental predicates as well as in a vocabulary that calls upon physical predicates. The events will be the same even though the descriptions are different. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, however, while Davidson has talked of the indeterminacy thesis as being one of the ideas that contributes to the thesis

of anomalous monism (see 'Mental Events', p.222), he has subsequently rejected this, treating his earlier comments as a 'mistake' (see 'Three Varieties of Knowledge', p.215; also 'Reply to Rorty', in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, p.595). In fact, once one considers the examples Davidson typically employs to illustrate the indeterminacy thesis, the point at issue here becomes fairly clear. The sort of indeterminacy of description that one finds in cases of measurement, for instance, are not cases that rule out a form of reducibility between the predicates or descriptive vocabularies that are involved. Thus we can 'reduce' descriptions of temperature given in degrees Fahrenheit to descriptions in degrees Centigrade and vice versa – we might argue that the reductions at issue are merely 'stipulative' or 'definitional', but reductions they nevertheless are. On this basis, mere indeterminacy, or 'multiplicity of description', does not itself imply irreducibility. This point ought to be, as Davidson emphasizes, a fairly obvious one and it underlies his claim that indeterminacy has no 'ontological' implications. Given the availability of multiple descriptions or alternative vocabularies, we still need some additional reason to suppose that those descriptions or vocabularies cannot be reduced one to another. The arguments adduced by Davidson in a variety of places in favor of anomalous monism can be viewed as arguments intended to supply the additional reasoning that is needed here. Significantly, however, they are arguments that appeal to the way in which the mental is constrained by quite normative principles that do not correlate with any physical principles. But, of course, in this respect, anomalous monism is underlain by holism, the same holism that I take also to underlie indeterminacy in the more specific sense associated with interpretation, namely, the sense in which there are always multiple ways of attributing attitudes, assigning meanings and identifying actions precisely because of the interdependent character of those attitudes, meanings and actions as such (see 'Three Varieties of Knowledge', Subjective, p.215). For more on anomalous monism, see §3.2.4 below.

⁵⁵ It should be emphasized that such indeterminacy does not undermine the 'reality' of those meanings and beliefs – as Davidson himself points out in 'Indeterminism and Antirealism', Subjective, pp.69-84 and in his 'Reply to Rorty', p.595.

⁵⁶ 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, p.142.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.144.

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- ⁵⁸ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.148 n. 6.
- ⁵⁹ As Christopher Peacocke puts it (though in a slightly different context): 'the verification of the applicability of a scheme of holistic explanation is itself holistic', Holistic Explanation: Action, Space, Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.216.
- ⁶⁰ See 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.149.
- ⁶¹ 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', Inquiries, pp.195-6. See also 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, pp.144-5 and 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.135.
- ⁶² Christopher Peacocke also takes Davidson up on this point, Holistic Explanation, pp.179-216. Jaakko Hintikka suggests that there are difficulties associated with Quine's original use of assent and dissent in radical translation. See Hintikka's 'Behavioral Criteria of Radical Translation', in Davidson and Hintikka (eds.), Words and Objections, pp.69-81 and Quine's reply in the same volume, pp.312-15.
- ⁶³ As Richard Rorty suggests in 'Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth', in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, p.343. There are indeed close similarities between the Davidsonian account of radical interpretation and the Rawlsian account of the development and justification of an idea of justice. In both cases we find a method employed which involves a balancing of differing considerations, as well as an emphasis on the need for some sort of agreement (though not such that it completely rules out difference) at the start. Nelson Goodman has a similar account of the justification of inferential procedures, Fact, Fiction and Forecast (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp.65-8. The reference to Goodman is made by Rawls himself in A Theory of Justice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.20 n. 7.
- ⁶⁴ 'On Empirically Equivalent Theories of the World', Erkenntnis, 9 (1975), p.322.
- ⁶⁵ Thus Ramberg comments that 'there is no harm in thinking of radical interpretation as the construction of a truth theory for a language, as long as we remember that "the construction of a theory of truth for a language" refers to the endless replacing of one truth-theory with another' (Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, p.80).
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.78
- ⁶⁷ See Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.174ff.

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- ⁶⁸ This is a familiar point in hermeneutic theory. In Schleiermacher, for instance, the point is made with respect to the interpretation of texts. Thus any portion of a text can only be understood in relation to the text as a whole, while the whole can only be understood in relation to the parts. See Schleiermacher, 'The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 lectures', New Literary History, 10 (1978-9), trans. Jan Wojcik and Roland Haas, pp.1-16. H.-G. Gadamer makes the point more broadly, see Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.190ff. In Gadamer, the circularity at issue here is picked up in a number of ways: through the positive role of prejudice in making possible understanding; the character of understanding as determined by the 'logic of question and answer'; and the dialogic structure of understanding that Gadamer finds exemplified and developed in Platonic dialectic.
- ⁶⁹ Expressing Evaluations (Kansas: The University of Kansas, The Lindley Lecture, 1984), p.18.
- ⁷⁰ For an account of charity with an orientation somewhat different from my own see Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.64-82.
- ⁷¹ 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, p.152.
- ⁷² This point is made most explicit by Richard Grandy, 'Reference, Meaning and Belief', Journal of Philosophy, 70 (1973), p.443.
- ⁷³ Finn Collin argues that the two ways of formulating charity in terms of agreement or in terms of truth are not equivalent formulations – see Finn Collin, 'Meta-constraints on Interpretation', American Philosophical Quarterly, 24 (1987), pp.137-48. Collin, however, fails to take sufficient account of the nature of Davidsonian holism, according to which truth and agreement are, in fact, tied together.
- ⁷⁴ See Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, p.72.
- ⁷⁵ Being able to move from interpreting observational to more theoretical utterances (a distinction which is itself not a clear-cut one) thus depends on the interdependence thesis, as well as on our ability, as it develops, to interrogate the speaker about her own beliefs. As our ability to communicate increases, the way we distinguish observational from theoretical sentences will alter. A much wider range of sentences may come to be viewed as observational sentences. This reflects the way in which what counts as part of the environmental circumstances may be extended as interpretation proceeds. While this account of the matter is largely my own, it does, I think, reflect the implicit Davidsonian position.

There is little explicit discussion of this issue in Davidson. See, however, ‘Radical Interpretation’, Inquiries, p.136 (and also p.127), and ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, pp.321-2.

⁷⁶ ‘Belief and the Basis of Meaning’, Inquiries, p.153.

⁷⁷ The idea of triangulation first appeared in ‘Rational Animals’, Subjective, p.105 (originally in Dialectica 36 [1982], p.327).

⁷⁸ ‘The Second Person’, Subjective, p.119. The use of this example illustrates something of the way in which the development of the idea of triangulation in Davidson originates in consideration of the significance of ostensive teaching and learning (see Davidson, ‘Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers’, in Kotatko et al [eds.], Interpreting Davidson, p.99 – the relevant passage is quoted by Davidson in ‘Externalisms’, in Kotatko et al [eds.], Interpreting Davidson, p.9).

⁷⁹ ‘Three Varieties of Knowledge’, Subjective, pp.205-20.

Notes to Chapter Three

¹ It is such ‘methodological’ holism that I take Michael Dummett to be referring when he says that ‘Holism merely in respect of how one might, starting from scratch, arrive at a theory of meaning for a language ... is ... unobjectionable and almost banal. It is certain that Davidson intends his holism as a doctrine with more bite than this’ (‘What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)’, in Guttenplan (ed.), Mind and Language, p.127).

² Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp.114 & 120.

³ ‘A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas’, Saussure, *ibid.*, p.120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.115-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.120

⁶ While the relations between psychological elements are not extrinsic to those elements, it is misleading to say that the relations between attitudes are an intrinsic feature of the attitudes themselves – the attitudes are constituted by the system of relations as a system of differences.

⁷ See, especially, Derrida, On grammatology, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). pp.27-73.

⁸ For a discussion of some similarities in the work of Derrida and Davidson, see Samuel C. Wheeler, 'Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson', in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.477-94. Wheeler also points out the similarities between the Saussurean idea of language as a system of differences and Quinean or Davidsonian holism, see 'Indeterminacy of French Interpretation', pp.479-80. In fact, while there are undoubtedly important points of contact between their approaches, there are also important points of divergence. In this respect, Davidson seems closer to Hans-Georg Gadamer than to Derrida, and some of Derrida's objections to the Gadamerian position could also be seen as applicable (though whether they can be sustained is another matter) to Davidson. On the dispute between Gadamer and Derrida, see Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (eds.), Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Debate (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989).

⁹ Thus Piaget's definition of structure as an arrangement which embodies the principles of wholeness, transformation and self-regulation applies as much to the psychological realm as described here as to many structuralist systems; see Jean Piaget, Structuralism, trans. Chaninah Maschler (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.3-16.

¹⁰ Davidson, 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', in Richard Wollheim and James Hopkins (eds.), Philosophical Essays on Freud (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.302.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.293.

¹² As in the discussions originating with Elizabeth Anscombe's Intention (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957)

¹³ 'The Myth of the Subjective', in Subjective, p.40.

¹⁴ Stephen Stich, From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science: The Case Against Belief (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford Books, MIT Press, 1983), p.55. It is worth noting that Stich argues for the holism of belief in order to show the shortcomings of folk psychology. Fodor's discussion appears in Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford Books, MIT Press, 1987), pp.60-2.

¹⁵ Fodor, Psychosemantics, p.62.

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- ¹⁶ Something that Fodor describes as a ‘crazy doctrine’ (Psychosemantics, p.60). ‘Meaning Holism’ is a term used by Putnam in discussing Quine. See Putnam, ‘Meaning Holism’, in L.E. Hahn and P. A. Schilpp (eds.), The Philosophy of W.V. Quine, The Library of Living Philosophers XVIII (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986), pp.405-26. Putnam is one of the main targets of Fodor’s attack.
- ¹⁷ Psychosemantics., pp.63-7. In Holism: A Shopper’s Guide, Fodor and LePore make no commitment on the question of Quine’s semantic ‘nihilism’ saying only that ‘Nihilism...is the view that most people take Quine to hold’, p.222, n.29.
- ¹⁸ ‘The Material Mind’, Essays, p.256.
- ¹⁹ Davidson himself makes this point specifically against Fodor and also Searle. See ‘What is Present to the Mind?’, Subjective, p.65.
- ²⁰ At least, not in Psychosemantics and in Holism: A Shopper’s Guide, Fodor, in combination with Ernie LePore, is quite explicit in stating that the book aims only at rebutting the arguments advanced in favor of holism and emphasizing, in addition, that ‘we want to distinguish very carefully, however, between claiming this and claiming that meaning holism isn’t true (or, for that matter, that it is true)...we both think that the available arguments for meaning holism are no good. That, and only that, is what this book will try to convince you of’ – Holism: A Shopper’s Guide, p.xii-xiii.
- ²¹ Fodor, Psychosemantics, p.55.
- ²² The specific indeterminacy associated with interpretation arises as a consequence of holism itself. And although the charge of vagueness may be avoided, it may be that one could object to holism on the grounds that the account it offers is circular since its central concepts will almost certainly be defined holistically; as I said above, the account will most likely be hostile to attempts at reductive definition. Certainly, an air of circularity will be inevitable in any holistic account of the psychological. The attempt to set out such an account is not a matter of simply setting out certain standard connections between concepts, beginning with the more basic and building from there. The psychological, conceived holistically, is resistant to this sort of analysis, for it lacks the structure that would make it possible. It is, instead, a matter of exhibiting a system of interconnected concepts that are typically defined in terms of each other. But if an air of circularity is thereby inevitable, it merely reflects the structure of that which is being described. It certainly cannot provide grounds for objecting to such an

account. On a similar problem of circularity in hermeneutic theory, see my 'Analysis and Hermeneutics'; see also my discussion in 'Gadamer, Davidson and the Ground of Understanding', in Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnschwald and Jens Kertscher (eds), Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp.203-9.

²³ In Holism: A Shopper's Guide, pp.11-17, Fodor and LePore discuss a number of wider philosophical implications that, in their view, follow from 'semantic holism'.

²⁴ See Devitt, Designation and Realism and Truth, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

²⁵ See Hartry Field, 'Tarski's Theory of Truth', Journal of Philosophy, 69 (1972), pp.347-75 and also Colin McGinn, 'Charity, Interpretation and Belief', Journal of Philosophy, 74 (1977), pp.521-35 and 'Radical Interpretation and Epistemology', in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.356-68.

²⁶ Along lines originally suggested by Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), Keith Donnellan, 'Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions', in Davidson and Harman (eds.), Semantics of Natural Languages, pp.356-79, and Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of "Meaning"', Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Vol.2, pp.215-71.

²⁷The functionalist paradigm is probably the most widely accepted and influential contemporary model for the understanding of the psychological. Functionalist accounts are usually taken to originate with Hilary Putnam, 'Minds and Machines', first published 1960, and reprinted in Mind, Language and Reality, pp.362-85. The view is that mental states are identical with functional states of the brain, that is, they are states that are understood in terms of their relation between perceptual input, other states and behavioral output. The model for functionalism is the modern computer, whose internal states can be understood in precisely this fashion: as computational states which compute input, in conjunction with other States, to provide certain output. Insofar as functionalism treats states in terms of their role with respect to other states, so it recognizes, to a degree, the holistic character of the psychological. Indeed, this represents one of the important points of difference between functionalism and what is regarded as its philosophical ancestor, behaviorism.

²⁸ See especially, 'Reality Without Reference', Inquiries, pp.215-25.

²⁹ See Davidson, *ibid.*, p.220.

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- ³⁰ Katz argues for a view of meaning based on the adoption of a largely Chomskyan view of language. See Katz, Language and Other Abstract Objects (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), The Metaphysics of Meaning (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), and ‘Why Intensionalists Ought Not Be Fregeans’, in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.59-91. Katz explicitly rejects the Davidsonian approach to semantics, as he also rejects that of Quine. See especially The Metaphysics of Meaning, pp.175-210 – see also the discussion in Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, pp.28-35.
- ³¹ ‘Reality without Reference’, Inquiries, p.220
- ³² See Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, pp.23-8. Ramberg comments that: ‘Without begging the question at issue without, that is, assuming that our reference-assigning causal theory is true – the only way to find out whether a particular expression refers to a particular object is to see how that term affects the truth-value of the sentences in which it occurs’ (Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, p.26).
- ³³ Davidson, ‘Reality Without Reference’, Inquiries, p.221.
- ³⁴ See Davidson, *ibid.*, p.222.
- ³⁵ The objection is made by, among others, Hartry Field, ‘Tarski’s Theory of Truth’, and Hilary Putnam, ‘The Meaning of “Meaning”’.
- ³⁶ As it also operates David Lewis’ related attempt to treat meaning as based on convention. See Davidson, ‘Communication and Convention’, Inquiries, pp.265-80 and also Lewis, ‘Languages and Language’, in Keith Gunderson (ed.), Language, Mind and Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp.3-35. See Jonathan Bennett, ‘Critical Notice of Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation’, for a defence of the Gricean approach against Davidson.
- ³⁷ In LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.433-46.
- ³⁸ In this respect the difference between Davidson and Grice may suggest some interesting parallels with the dispute between Gadamer and E. D. Hirsch. Taking issue with Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach, Hirsch argues in favour of giving primacy to author’s intentions in the interpretation of texts, and arguing against notions of indeterminacy in textual interpretation – see E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Hirsch discusses Gadamer specifically,

ibid., pp.245ff. Gadamer sees things in a more holistic and interpretative manner, see Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.164ff. The dispute between Hirsch and Gadamer is discussed by David Couzens Hay in The Critical Circle: Literature, History and Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

³⁹ Functionalism arose out of difficulties concerning the impossibility of identifying mental states with physical states of the brain given that similar mental states might well be realizable in different underlying physical states. Thus Martian pain may be much like human pain and yet realized in quite a different neurophysiological structure – Martians, after all, need not share human anatomy or physiology. For the classic essay in this area see David Lewis, ‘Mad Pain and Martian Pain’, in Ned Block (ed.), Readings in Philosophy of Psychology, I (London: Methuen, 1980), pp.216-22.) While functionalism denies the possibility of any simple reduction of mental to physical states in general, it seems that functionalism is nevertheless likely to be committed to a strong reductionism between states that will obtain at least with respect to particular species or to species that share a common neuropsychological structure. See, for instance, Jaegwon Kim, ‘The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism’, Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, 63 (1990), pp.36-9.

⁴⁰ ‘Belief and the Basis of Meaning’, Inquiries, p.154.

⁴¹ As the argument is set out in ‘Mental Events’, Davidson sets himself the task of demonstrating the compatibility of three principles: (i) ‘The Principle of Causal Interaction’ according to which ‘at least some mental events interact causally with physical events’; (ii) ‘The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality’ according to which ‘events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws’; and (iii) ‘The Anomalism of the Mental’ according to which ‘there are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained’ (‘Mental Events’, Essays, p.208). It should be noted that the last of these principles does not imply that there are no possible generalizations that may be arrived at in the psycho-physical domain, but only that there are no strict laws.

⁴² See ‘Mental Events’, Essays, pp.222-3, also ‘Psychology as Philosophy’, Essays, p.230.

⁴³ ‘Mental Events’, Essays, p.223.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, *ibid.*, pp.209-15. In ‘Mental Events’ Davidson treats events as identical if they have the same causes and effects (see also ‘The Individuation of Events’, *Essays*, p.179), though he has since modified his position on the nature of event identity (see ‘Adverbs of Action’, *Essays*, pp.293-304).

⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*, pp.163-80, and ‘Events as Particulars’, *Essays*, pp.181-7. Mental descriptions supervene upon, but are not reducible to, physical descriptions – see ‘Mental Events’, *Essays*, p.214. Simon Evnine claims that Davidson can no longer hold to this view (see Evnine, *Donald Davidson* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991], pp.70-1). While I agree with Evnine that Davidson’s views on these matters have certainly evolved, I am not sure that he needs to abandon the notion of supervenience. If supervenience is captured in the slogan ‘no difference without a physical difference’, then one could hold to a form of supervenience even while holding that two individuals could differ in their psychological descriptions, but not in their physical descriptions. At a very narrow level of description, there may well be differences in psychological descriptions which seem not to be tied to any physical differences (at that narrow level of description), but which may nevertheless be tied to relevant differences at a wider level of description. Perhaps mental descriptions should be treated as supervening on physical descriptions only globally (in terms of the wider psychological or physical system in general), and not locally (in terms of; say, a particular event of deciding or remembering or a particular neural firing). Thus it is descriptions of the psychological in general which properly supervene on descriptions of the body in general (and not merely on descriptions of particular brain events). Of course, since there is no way of giving a complete account of the psychological (see §4.1) this may mean that it is impossible ever to account for the causal efficacy of the psychological, or to fully explain the relation between the mental and the physical.

⁴⁶ Davidson’s account of anomalous monism is developed in ‘Mental Events’, *Essays*, pp.207-27, ‘Psychology as Philosophy’, *Essays*, pp.229-44, and ‘The Material Mind’, *Essays*, pp.245-59. Davidson has replied to various objections to his position, and has also attempted to rectify various misunderstandings, in ‘Thinking Causes’, in John Heil and Alfred Mele (eds.), *Mental Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.3-17; see also Davidson’s entry on himself (titled ‘Donald Davidson’) in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.231-6. Since anomalous monism could be characterized as embodying a monistic ontology

coupled with multiple modes of ‘presentation’, so it could be viewed as an essentially Spinozistic position and Davidson has himself presented anomalous monism in this fashion. See ‘Spinoza’s Causal Theory of the Affects’, in Y. Yovel (ed.), Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist, (New York: Little Room Press, 1999), pp.95-111. For more on anomalous monism and a defense of non-reductive monism in the philosophy of mind see Cynthia Macdonald, Mind-Body Identity Theories (London: Routledge, 1990) – see especially the discussion of Davidson, pp.84ff. So far as the phrase ‘anomalous monism’ is itself concerned, Simon Evnine points out that ‘Davidson wishes “anomalous” to be understood as a privative form of “nomological” ... [but]... “[a]nomalous” is not from “a-nomos” but from “an-omalos”, the privative form of the word for regular or even’ (Evnine, Donald Davidson, p.184).

⁴⁷ ‘Replies to Essays X-XII’, in Bruce Vermazen and Merrill Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.244-5. This is not a new view for Davidson. In ‘Mental Events’, while arguing for anomalous monism as a form of identity theory, Davidson carefully distinguishes between such monism and materialism: ‘Anomalous monism resembles materialism in its claim that all events are physical, but rejects the thesis, usually considered essential for materialism, that mental phenomena can be given purely physical descriptions. Anomalous monism shows an ontological bias only in that it allows the possibility that not all events are mental, while insisting that all events are physical’ (Essays, p.214). Thus, while Frederick Stoutland comments that ‘Davidson claims to be a materialist’, the Davidsonian position seems, in fact, to be close to that described by Stoutland himself when he says ‘an adequate ontology should be monistic but not materialist, which doesn’t mean it should be idealist either’, ‘Davidson on Intentional Behavior’, in LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, p.54.

⁴⁸ Jaegwon Kim argues to such a conclusion in ‘The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism’, pp.31-47. He writes that ‘Anomalous monism, rather than giving us a form of nonreductive physicalism, is essentially a form of eliminativism. Unlike eliminativism, it allows mentality to exist; but mentality is given no useful work and its occurrence is left wholly mysterious and causally inexplicable’ (*ibid.*, p.35). Here Kim seems to assume, amongst other things, that the only ‘useful work’ is causal work. For more on the problem of explaining how the mental properties of events may be relevant to the

causal properties of the physical events with which those mental events are identical, see Kim, 'The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism', and also, for instance: Frederick Stoutland, 'Davidson on Intentional Behavior'; Ted Honderich, 'The Argument for Anomalous Monism', Analysis, 42 (1982), pp.59-64 (with a reply by Peter Smith, 'Bad News for Anomalous Monism?', Analysis, 42 (1982), pp.220-4); and Louise Antony, 'Anomalous Monism and the Problem of Explanatory Force'. Ernest LePore and Barry Loewer defend the Davidsonian position in 'Mind Matters', Journal of Philosophy, 84 (1987), pp.630-42. See Davidson's comments on some of these issues in 'Problems in the Explanation of Action', in Philip Pettit, Richard Sylvan and Jean Norman (eds.), Metaphysics and Morality: Essays in Honour of J. J. C. Smart (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.35-49.

⁴⁹ This is a claim Davidson advances in 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', Essays, pp.3-19. Davidson's view that reasons can only be causes insofar as they are identical with physical events, derives from his adoption of an essentially Hempelian view of causation. He thus treats causal statements as entailing the existence of a causal law, see *ibid.*, pp.16-17, and also 'Causal Relations,' Essays, pp.149-162.

⁵⁰ See 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, pp.144-7.

⁵¹ 'Knowing One's Own Mind', Subjective, p.33. Indeed, the symmetry seems even to extend to a certain mirroring of features of the psychological, in particular its holism and indeterminacy, in the physical, as Patrick Suppes points out. See Suppes, 'Davidson's Views on Psychology as a Science', in Vermazen and Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson, pp.183-94, and also Davidson's reply in the same volume, 'Replies to Essays X-XII', pp.247-52. Davidson acknowledges some such symmetry in 'Mental Events', Essays, p.222. The existence of such symmetry does not, it should be noted, undermine the difference between the physical and the psychological. Whatever holism characterizes the physical realm, it is not the holism of rationality.

⁵² One area of difficulty for functionalism (and physicalist accounts generally) is in dealing with the qualitative nature of psychological states, see Ned Block, 'Troubles with Functionalism', in Block (ed.), Readings in Philosophy of Psychology, I, pp.268-305. Thomas Nagel argues that such accounts cannot account for the subjective character of conscious experience – see Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', in Mortal Questions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.165-80. Nagel is discussed briefly in chapter four below (§4.2.6).

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- ⁵³ Putnam argues that truth, in particular, cannot be made sense of on a purely physicalist account, see Representation and Reality (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), pp.57-72.
- ⁵⁴ Of course, if we were willing to abandon concepts such as meaning, belief and so forth – the concepts of so-called ‘folk-psychology’ – then one simply replace such notions with purely physicalist concepts. Stephen Stich argues in favor of such a move (see Stephen Stich, From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science) that would eliminate the indeterminacies of the folk-psychological in return for the promissory notes of cognitive science.
- ⁵⁵ Loar, Mind and Meaning, pp.20-5. See also the brief discussion in William G. Lycan, ‘Semantics and Methodological Solipsism’, in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, especially p.249.
- ⁵⁶ ‘Functionalism and Anomalous Monism’, pp.388-89.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.389-94.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p.394.
- ⁵⁹ I thus treat charity as a rationality constraint, as well as a constraint that requires agreement on truths. Some philosophers have tried to separate these two elements of charity or to treat rationality as a separate principle. Such a strategy does not fit with the holistic approach I have argued for here. For more on charity see chapter five below.
- ⁶⁰ Ross Harrison writes that ‘Rationality is the inevitable glue which holds the pairs of beliefs and desires together’, ‘Introduction’, in Ross Harrison (ed.), Rational Action: Studies in Philosophy and Social Science (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.viii.
- ⁶¹ For an interesting and thorough discussion of emotion, and the integration of the emotions with the rest of the psychological, see Ronald de Sousa, The Rationality of Emotion (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987). Sousa suggests a much richer sense in which emotions may be rational in addition to their merely being coherent with the rest of the psychological.
- ⁶² Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, trans. Alan Tyson (London: Ernest Benn, 1966), p.162.
- ⁶³ On this matter see Theodore Mischel, ‘Concerning Rational Explanation and Psychoanalytic Explanation’, in Richard Wollheim (ed.), Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Anchor, 1974), pp.322-31. The paper is a reply to Peter Alexander, ‘Rational Explanation and Psychoanalytic Explanation’, in the same volume, pp.305-21.

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- ⁶⁴ Jon Elster, Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.1. The terminology is derived from Rawls' notion of a 'thin theory of the good', A Theory of Justice, pp.396ff.
- ⁶⁵ That the term 'rationality' (and 'irrationality') has a range of different uses is noted by Dagfinn Føllesdal in 'The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and the Explanation of Action', Dialectica, 36 (1982) p.304. Føllesdal refers to Jon Elster's identification of over 20 different senses of irrationality see Jon Elster, 'Rationality', in Guttorm Fløistad (ed.), Contemporary Philosophy. A New Survey, II (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), pp.111-31.
- ⁶⁶ Michael Oakeshott, 'Rational Conduct', in Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays (London: Methuen, 1979), p.109.
- ⁶⁷ The fact that psychological consistency is not a matter of strict logical consistency provides support for the point that the constraining effect of charity is itself subject to a fair degree of flexibility. See the discussion of indeterminacy in chapter two above, and the further discussion of charity in chapter five (§5.3.3).
- ⁶⁸ 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', p.289.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Although, for an account of the Davidsonian position that does attempt to bring it into close proximity to that of Freud, see Marcia Cavell, The Psychoanalytic Mind. From Freud to Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993)
- ⁷¹ Here Heidegger's notion of truth as aletheia ('unconcealment') already comes into view (see chapter seven).
- ⁷² In this connection Jennifer Radden's Madness and Reason (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), provides an interesting discussion of the conception of madness as unreason – as a failure in the overall rationality of the mind.
- ⁷³ The requirement of overall consistency is of course a requirement that can be expressed in the so-called 'law' of non-contradiction. If there is a 'law' or 'rule' that governs the psychological realm then this is perhaps it. But this 'law' is obeyed in many different ways and itself possesses a great degree of flexibility. Indeed such a 'law' cannot be said to 'govern' the psychological realm but instead merely

expresses the holistic character of that realm insofar as it embodies the requirement of the overall consistency of the psychological. Thus it is in the nature of the psychological realm to tend towards the overall integration of the attitudes, behavior, and so forth that constitute that realm. The 'law' of noncontradiction is merely a formalization of this characteristic feature of the psychological.

⁷⁴ 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', p.303. See the almost identical comment in Davidson, 'Expressing Evaluations', p.18.

⁷⁵ In this respect Christopher Cherniack seems simply mistaken in his view of Davidson as an advocate of what he calls 'ideal' or 'perfect' as opposed to 'minimal' consistency in attitudes (see Christopher Cherniack, Minimal Rationality (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford Books, MIT Press, 1986), pp.17-18). Apart from this difference in the reading of Davidson, however, I am largely in agreement with Cherniack's analysis of the way in which rationality constrains psychology.

⁷⁶ 'Anomalous Monism and the Irreducibility of the Mental', in LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, p.356. McLaughlin adds that the lack of precision in the notion of rationality here 'seems to point to an additional indeterminacy of interpretation'.

⁷⁷ This is a point noted by Jon Elster in discussing rational choice theory (the primary example of a theory which attempts to provide a more technical notion of rationality). See Elster 'Introduction', in Jon Elster (ed.), Rational Choice (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.24. Elster does add, however, that this does not mean that rational choice theory cannot help us 'a good deal' even in the case of more complex decisions. Elster discusses some of the limitations of rational choice theory in 'The Nature and Scope of Rational-Choice Explanation', in LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, pp.60-72.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Barry Hindness, Choice, Rationality and Social Theory (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

⁷⁹ See Elster, 'Introduction', in Elster (ed.), Rational Choice, p.27.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', Inquiries, 'A New Basis for Decision Theory' and 'The Structure and Content of Truth'.

⁸¹ See, for instance, Barry Hindness, Choice, Rationality and Social Theory, especially chapters 4 and 5, pp.42-92; also Martin Hollis, 'Rational Man and Social Science', in Harrison (ed.), Rational Action,

pp.1-16. Elster also gives a summary of objections and alternatives to rational choice theory in the 'Introduction', in Elster (ed.), Rational Choice, pp.17-27.

⁸² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Cohn Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp.xix-xx.

⁸³ Ibid., p.xx.

⁸⁴ 'Rational Animals', Subjective, p.95.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.105.

⁸⁷ See 'Thought and Talk', and 'Rational Animals'. The point is also made in 'The Conditions of Thought', Brandl and Gombocz (eds.), The Mind of Donald Davidson, pp.198-200.

⁸⁸ 'Replies to Essays X-XII', in Vermazen and Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson, p.252.

⁸⁹ See Chomsky, Language and Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p.100. This point is put by Gadamer in a slightly different fashion. Gadamer distinguishes between the world as 'habitat' (Umwelt) and the world as 'World' (Welt). Human beings possess a relationship to the World that is quite distinct from the relationship of the animal to its habitat. Indeed, the World is already given to us, prior to our specific encounters with it. Here the notion of the World is identical to the notion of the 'world-horizon' that I shall refer to in later chapters (see also below §3.4.3) – it is the notion of an open realm of possibilities with which we are 'always already' involved. In this respect the human World contrasts with the animal habitat insofar as the latter is a realm in which the possibilities are strictly limited and constrained. Gadamer comments that 'unlike all other living creatures, man's relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from environment. This freedom implies the linguistic constitution of the world. Both belong together. To rise above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world means to have language and to have "world"' (Truth and Method, p.444).

⁹⁰ In his discussion of Patrick Suppes in 'Replies to Essays X-XII', in Vermazen and Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson, pp.251-2, Davidson agrees that the trouble with the argument as set out in 'Thought and Talk', and 'Rational Animals', is that 'the general thesis that animals don't have beliefs leaves us without our usual useful way of explaining and describing their behavior'. He then sets out 'a better and less contentious way' of putting his view; a way which largely depends on emphasizing

the holism of attitudes and behavior, and which points to some of the differences (outlined below) between human and non-human psychology.

⁹¹ See, for instance, the bibliography on this topic in David Premack, “‘Gavagai!’ or the future history of the animal language controversy”, Cognition 19 (1985), pp.207-96.

⁹² The latter term is used by C. B. Martin, ‘Proto-Language’, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 65 (1987), pp.277-89.

⁹³ ‘Replies to Essays X-XII’, in Vermazen and Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson, p.252.

⁹⁴ See Dreyfus, What Computers Can’t Do (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) and also ‘Holism and Hermeneutics’, Review of Metaphysics, 34 (1980), pp.3-23. There are a number of problems with Dreyfus’ reading of Davidson, but his criticisms do reflect more general objections to Davidson that, in addition to the discussion here, are also dealt with, directly and indirectly, in other sections below. In particular, I discuss some of the objections to Davidson’s (and Gadamer’s) translational conception of interpretation in §5.4.2 below, while Davidson’s own criticism of traditional epistemology, and particularly his rejection of the scheme-content distinction and the idea of subjectivity with which it is related (ideas that can be seen to underlie the representationalism that concerns Dreyfus) , is dealt with in chapter seven. The idea of our involvement in the world as grounded in an essentially non-propositional, practically oriented background has been the focus for a great deal of attention, within the phenomenological tradition, under the heading of the ‘life-world’ – a notion that appears in Husserl in its most developed form in the Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, in particular, it has been the focus for a great deal of attention under the heading of the ‘life-world’ – a notion that appears in Husserl in its most developed form in the Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology and is also developed in the work of other thinkers, especially It is an idea developed further in the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and also Alfred Schütz,

⁹⁵ ‘Holism and Hermeneutics’, pp.6-7.

⁹⁶ Being-in-the-World. A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time Division I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), p.49.

⁹⁷ This view is often taken to have its origins in the work of Gareth Evans – see The Varieties of Reference

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp.122ff. For some of the arguments that are usually cited in favor of the idea of nonconceptual content, and that follow on from Evans' original account, see: Tim Crane, 'The Waterfall Illusion', Analysis 48 (1988), pp.142-3 and also 'The Non-conceptual Content of Experience' in Crane (ed.), The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.136-57; also Christopher Peacocke, 'Analogue Content', Proc. Aristotelian Society, Supp. Vol 60 (1986), pp.1-17 and also 'Perceptual Content', in J. Almog, J. Perry and H. Wettstein (eds.), Themes from Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.297-329.

⁹⁸ Thus Hubert Dreyfus writes: 'Are there two fundamentally different ways we make sense of the world, or does all understanding consist in using concepts to think about things? The philosophical tradition has, generally assumed, or in the case of Kant, argued persuasively, that there is only one kind of intelligibility, the unified understanding we have of things when we make judgments that objectify our experience by bringing it under concepts. But there have always been others – painters, writers, historians, linguists, philosophers in the romantic tradition, Wittgensteinians and existential phenomenologists – who have felt that there is another kind of intelligibility that gets us in touch with reality besides the conceptual kind elaborated by Kant', Dreyfus, 'Introduction: Tode's Account of Non-conceptual Perceptual Knowledge and its Relation to Thought', in Samuel L. Todes, Body and World (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p.xv.

⁹⁹ Again see Dreyfus, *ibid*, and also the various 'Responses' in Wrathall and Malpas (eds.), Heidegger, Coping and Cognitive Science. See also Mark Wrathall, 'The Conditions of Truth in Heidegger and Davidson', pp.318-20 – Wrathall argues, following Dreyfus, that our pragmatic engagement with the world is independent of language and that it is this pragmatic, nonlinguistic, nonconceptual engagement that is the basis for the possibility of language, conceptuality and also, it should be said, for truth (where truth is understood as a matter of correctness). It is partly this that leads Wrathall to argue that Heidegger was correct in his later thinking in distinguishing the conditions for truth from truth itself – truth is thus restricted to the linguistic and underlain by the pragmatic, the latter being the basis for the original revealing of things that Heidegger terms 'aletheia'. See the discussion in §7.4.2 below.

¹⁰⁰ Although he does not explicitly acknowledge the difficulty in making sense of a notion of content where such content cannot be given prepositional expression, Crane has suggested that it may be preferable to talk, not of nonconceptual content, as such, but of nonconceptual states for which he provides the following characterization: ‘for a subject S to be in a non-conceptual state with content P, S does not have to possess the concepts which S would have to possess if S were in a conceptual state with content p. If we call these concepts the concepts which are canonical for P, then we can say that a state with non-conceptual content is one of which the following is true: in order for a subject, S, to be in a state with a content P, S does not have to possess the concepts canonical for P’, Tim Crane, ‘Content, Non-Conceptual’, in Edward Craig (ed.), Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1998), p.641.

¹⁰¹ See Searle, Intentionality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.141-59.

¹⁰² Trans. David Carr (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Carr provides an excellent discussion of the notion of the world-horizon or ‘life-world’ as it appears in Husserl in David Carr, ‘Husserl’s World and Ours’, Journal of the History of Philosophy, 25 (1987), pp.151-67; see also Ludwig Landgrabe, ‘The World as a Phenomenological Problem’, in Ludwig Landgrabe, The Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl: Six Essays, ed. Donn Welton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp.122-48.

¹⁰³ For a useful introductory discussion to the concept of the life-world in Husserl and in the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty see John Wild, ‘Man and his Life-World’, in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), For Roman Ingarden: Nine Essays in Phenomenology (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), pp.90-109; see also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Philosopher and His Shadow’, in Signs, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp.172-81. On the work of Alfred Schutz, see Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, The Structures of the Life-World, trans. George Welsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973). The notion of the world has been developed in an interesting way, partly under the influence of Heidegger, but also of the later Wittgenstein, in the work of Jakob Meløe. See Meløe, ‘The Agent and his World’, in Gunnar Skirbekk (ed.), Praxeology: An Anthology (Bergen, Oslo, Stavanger, Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1983), pp.13-29. Meløe’s account of action is one that sets

itself in clear opposition to the standard belief-desire model, but, as the discussion above should indicate, this need not mean that it is incompatible with the holistic Davidsonian account offered here.

¹⁰⁴ A ‘form of life’ is essentially a matter of shared practices. Thus Wittgenstein comments that ‘it is our acting that lies at the bottom of the language game’ (On Certainty, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), Section 204; see also Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), §241).

¹⁰⁵ See especially ‘What is Present to the Mind?’, Subjective, pp.53-68.

¹⁰⁶ Such a view of the nature of attitudes is close to that advanced by some pragmatists, notably C. S. Peirce – see, for instance, Peirce, ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’, in Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Vol. 5, Pragmatism and Pragmaticism (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1935), p.397: ‘The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit; and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise’.

¹⁰⁷ Here I am drawing on some of Davidson’s comments such as those in ‘Indeterminism and Antirealism’, Subjective, especially pp.76-7. In the latter paper, of course, one of Davidson’s aims is to clarify certain misunderstandings surrounding the indeterminacy thesis. That thesis plays an important role in this context, however, in undercutting the idea that commitment to propositionality as a central element in the structure of the psychological is inconsistent with rejection of any representational model of the relation between attitudes and the world.

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, ‘Seeing Through Language’, in John Preston (ed.), Thought and Language, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 42, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.18 & 27.

¹⁰⁹ Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.474. Gadamer’s conception of language is very close to that of Heidegger. Both view language, not as some means by which we gain access to the world, nor as merely some ‘mechanism’ or ‘calculus’, but rather as that in and through which thinking and our access to the world occurs. Thus Heidegger famously refers to language as the ‘house of Being and the home of human beings’ (see ‘Letter on Humanism’ in Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell [New York: HarperCollins, re. edn. 1993], p.262). Davidson adopts a somewhat similar position, if without the same dramatic turn of phrase, viewing language as closely tied to thought and

as that through which we have access to the world. Charles Taylor, however, reads Davidson as exemplary of a quite opposite position, see Taylor, 'Language and Human Nature' and 'Theories of Meaning', in Human Agency and Language, Philosophical Papers Vol 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.215-292,.

¹¹⁰ On Grammatology, p.158

¹¹¹ See Derrida, 'Living On: Border Lines', trans. J. Rulbert, in H. Bloom et al (eds.), Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p.84.

¹¹² See Rudolphe Gasché, The Tain of the Mirror. Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.280.

¹¹³ See, for instance, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', Inquiries, and 'The Myth of the Subjective', Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective.

¹¹⁴ This is, of course, the conclusion that Derek Parfit also reaches, though on somewhat different grounds. See Parfit, Reasons and Persons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.213, where he says that in some cases identity may be indeterminate. See also the more general discussion of personal identity in Part Three of Parfit's book, pp.199-345.

¹¹⁵ Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p.178.

¹¹⁶ The philosopher who has perhaps done most (at least within phenomenological circles) to emphasize the crucial connection between embodiment and personhood (between ourselves and our bodies) is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See The Phenomenology of Perception, especially pp.203ff. It is also a feature of Heidegger's thought and represents one of the differences between Heidegger and Husserl. On this see Dagfinn Føllesdal, 'Husserl and Heidegger on the Role of Actions in the Constitution of the World', in E. Saarinen, R. Hilpinen and M. Provenca Hintikka (eds.), Essays in Honour of Jaakko Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), pp.365-78, especially pp.376ff. The issue, not merely of embodiment, but also of locatedness, is central to the argument in my Place and Experience. Inasmuch as the argument there is based in a form of holism that develops out of the considerations set out here, so Place and Experience can be seen as providing a more detailed case for the necessary interconnection of person, body and place.

¹¹⁷ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.150.

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- ¹¹⁸ See Place and Experience, pp.92ff.
- ¹¹⁹ ‘Rational Animals’, Subjective, p.105.
- ¹²⁰ Expressing Evaluations, p.18.
- ¹²¹ See especially ‘Three Varieties of Knowledge’, Subjective, pp.212-3.
- ¹²² ‘Davidson on Intentional Behavior’, in LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, p.49.
- ¹²³ Though some sense of what Davidson calls ‘first-person authority’ is in fact preserved – contrary to Stoutland’s suggestions, *ibid.* See chapter 4 below.
- ¹²⁴ The idea that interpretation always takes place against a communal background is suggested most clearly by Davidson himself in ‘Thought and Talk’, Inquiries, p.170.
- ¹²⁵ Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.306-7, p.374. & pp.396-7.
- ¹²⁶ The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology, p.253.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.255.
- ¹²⁹ See Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.446 (‘Thus the world is the common ground, trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another’) and Davidson, ‘Rational Animals’, Subjective, p.480, also ‘The Conditions of Thought’, in Brandl and Gombocz (eds.), The Mind of Donald Davidson, pp.199-200.
- ¹³⁰ ‘Reply to Dagfinn Føllesdal’, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, p.732.
- ¹³¹ In LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.433-46. In ‘The Social Aspect of Language’, p.1, Davidson begins, however, with the question: ‘Which is conceptually primary, the idiolect or the language?’ and goes on in a way that makes clear that he takes himself to be ‘promoting the primacy of the idiolect’. As Davidson proceeds to clarify his position in this paper, however, it becomes evident, that he is arguing less for the primacy of the idiolect than against those accounts of language that give primacy to convention. The contrast between idiolect and language thus fits with Davidson’s approach only somewhat awkwardly.
- ¹³² For Davidson’s original comments on Lewis’ paper see ‘Replies to Lewis and Quine’, Inquiries, pp.281-85.
- ¹³³ ‘Postscript to “Radical Interpretation” – A. Karl and Others of his Kind’, in Philosophical Papers, I

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.119.

¹³⁴ On this matter, see especially ‘The Social Aspect of Language’.

¹³⁵ Putnam, ‘The Meaning of “Meaning”’, p.227. Davidson himself endorses this slogan in ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, Subjective, p.44. It is worth noting, however, that Davidson’s endorsement must be qualified in certain respects – he does not accept, what he takes to be suggested by Putnam’s slogan, that all mental-physical identity theories are thereby shown to be mistaken – see ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, p.47; also ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’, Subjective, pp.31-34. He also does not accept that the fact that external states and events are implicated in the psychological shows that speakers might be ignorant or mistaken about what they mean or believe – although that there is an inconsistency here is a common objection to the Davidsonian position, see, for instance, Simon Evnine, Donald Davidson, p.167. The issue is discussed in chapter four below – §4.1.2. The issue is addressed by Davidson most fully in ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’ and ‘Indeterminism and Antirealism’, Subjective, pp.69-84. See also my ‘Self-knowledge and Scepticism’, Erkenntnis 40 (1994), pp.165-184.

¹³⁶ Philip Pettit and John McDowell, ‘Introduction’, in Philip Pettit and John McDowell (eds.), Subject, Thought and Context (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.14.

¹³⁷ ‘Individualism and the Mental’, in p.A. French, T. E. Uehling Jr. and H. K. Wettstein (eds.), Midwest Studies in Philosophy 4: Studies in Metaphysics (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1979), pp.73-121; ‘Other Bodies’, in Andrew Woodfield (ed.), Thought and Object (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp.97-120; and ‘Two Thought Experiments’, Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic, 23 (1982), pp.284-93. Unlike Putnam, Burge argues for the dependence of meaning on the social context of utterance, rather than on the more general facts of the physical environment. Thus, what my words mean depends on the social conventions that obtain at the time of utterance.

¹³⁸ See especially Saul Kripke, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

. For Davidson’s own comments on Kripke’s discussion of this matter, see especially ‘The Social Aspect of Language’ and ‘The Second Person’.

¹³⁹ See my ‘Locating Interpretation: The Topography of Understanding in Heidegger and Davidson.’ In

‘The Source of the Subjective’, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, pp.459-71, Bjørn T. Ramberg connects Gadamer’s hermeneutics explicitly with an externalist approach to intentionality. While Gadamer seems to have been somewhat nonplussed by Ramberg’s discussion (see ‘Reply to Bjørn T. Ramberg’, in Hahn [ed.], The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, pp.472-3), he was certainly not hostile. In fact, the externalist elements in Davidson and within the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition can both be seen as deriving from similarly anti-Cartesian approaches.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’, Subjective, pp.24-5. Davidson also argues that such holism need not, however, create any problems for his claim that psychological and physical states are identical; *ibid.*, pp.21 and 28-30.

¹⁴¹ See Putnam, Representation and Reality (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), p.75.

¹⁴² Putnam, *ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁴³ In this connection see Jennifer Hornsby, ‘Physicalist Thinking and Conceptions of Behavior’, in Pettit and McDowell (eds.), Subject, Thought and Context, pp.95-115.

Notes to Chapter Four

¹ In fact it seems likely that indeterminacy in Quine cannot be restricted to the linguistic, but implies a more general indeterminacy of the mental. See Dagfinn Føllesdal, ‘Indeterminacy and Mental States’, in Barrett and Gibson (eds.), Perspectives on Quine, pp.98-109, especially p.107.

² Davidson, ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, Subjective, pp.150-1.

³ There have been suggestions that Davidson puts more emphasis on the identification of the objects of belief with the causes of belief than I allow here. This might seem to follow from the fact that he is reported as arguing that an envatted brain ought to be taken as having beliefs about, not trees or other external objects, but about events in its cerebral cortex – see Colin McGinn, ‘Radical Interpretation and Epistemology’, in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, p.360 n. 11, and Richard Rorty, ‘Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth’, p.340 n. 15. Davidson’s position here is, however, more complex than it might first seem. See the brief discussion in 6.3.4 below.

⁴ See 'Psychology as Philosophy', Essays, p.231. In 'Davidson's Unintended Attack on Psychology' (in LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, p.401) Alexander Rosenberg distinguishes closure in the sense I use it here from Davidson's point about the causally open character of the mental. Rosenberg also suggests a connection between the idea of 'interpretative closure', the hermeneutic circle and Brentano's notion of the 'closure' of intentional science. The idea of interpretative closure is related to the idea that causes cannot, simply qua causes, be reasons.

⁵ Davidson, 'The Inscrutability of Reference', Inquiries, p.241.

⁶ See Davidson, 'First Person Authority'.

⁷ 'Paradoxes of Irrationality', p.302.

⁸ It is the main point of discussion in 'Knowing One's Own Mind', Subjective. See also 'The Myth of the Subjective', Subjective, pp.48-50 and 'What is Present to the Mind?', Subjective, pp.60-2.

⁹ See especially pp.24ff.

¹⁰ 'Knowing One's Own Mind', Subjective, p.28.

¹¹ 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)', p.133. See also Patrick Suppes, 'Davidson's Views on Psychology as a Science', p.189. Suppes comments, in a similar vein to Dummett: 'On the holistic theory of language, meaning, and interpretation advanced in ['Mental Events'] ... it is not easy to see how a child could acquire beliefs at all.' Davidson replies that 'there is no reason a child cannot slowly master a complex system without it ever being accurate to say he has mastered part of it first', 'Replies to Essays X-XII', in Vermazen and Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson, p.252. This issue is also discussed by Simon Evnine in Donald Davidson, pp.151-3; Evnine largely repeats the sorts of objections raised by Dummett and Suppes.

¹² Dummett's objection seems related to an objection advanced by Fodor in Psychosemantics, pp.56-7.

Fodor argues that since the identity of a propositional attitude is determined by the 'totality of its epistemic liaisons' and since that totality of connections will most likely differ from one individual to another, so no two individuals can ever be held to be in the same intentional state. This is a conclusion Fodor finds unacceptable insofar as it would be a barrier to the development of an intentional psychology. Fodor's position is clearly subject to much the same criticisms as Dummett's. Ramberg argues against Fodor on just this point, though along somewhat different tines, in Donald Davidson's

Philosophy of Language, pp.91-2.

¹³ While he does not deploy the notion in the same way as Davidson employs the idea of the ‘partitioning’ of the mental, Akeel Bilgrami proposes that ‘content’, while externally determined, also be understood as ‘localized’. See Bilgrami, Belief and Meaning (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.11-13.

¹⁴ See Helmut Kuhn (‘The Phenomenological Concept of “Horizon”’, in Marvin Farber (ed.), Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp.106-23), for an excellent brief account of the notion of horizon.

¹⁵ The notion of ‘horizon’ appears in a number of places throughout Husserl’s work, though perhaps the most extensive discussions are in Cartesian Meditations and Experience and Judgement. Husserl distinguishes between the act-horizon and the object-horizon (see David Woodruff Smith and Ronald MacIntyre, Husserl and Intentionality (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1982), pp.227-65), as well as between the inner and outer horizons (on the latter, see Smith and MacIntyre, *ibid.*, pp.256-8). Neither the distinction between act and object horizon nor between inner and outer horizon shall concern me here. I am grateful to Don Letham for providing me with an extensive list of references to the concept of horizontality as it appears in Husserl.

¹⁶ See Smith and MacIntyre, Husserl and Intentionality, pp.229-33.

¹⁷ One of the foremost theorists in contemporary literary hermeneutics is Hans Robert Jauss. He provides an excellent account of the history of the concept of ‘horizon’ in ‘Horizon Structure and Dialogicity’, in Hans Robert Jauss, Question and Answer. Forms of Dialogic Understanding (Theory and History of Literature, 68), ed. and trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp.199-207.

¹⁸ Davidson, ‘Mental Events’, Essays, p.210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.211.

²⁰ Although it is discussed, implicitly at least, in ‘What is Present to the Mind?’.

²¹ In particular it will not commit me – or Davidson – to the view that there exist ‘in the mind’ some special class of mental objects that are the objects of intentional acts and that individuate those acts. Such ‘objects of thought’ are explicitly rejected by Davidson himself (see Davidson, ‘What is Present to the Mind?’ where the point is particularly important in relation to Davidson’s views on

externalism), as well as by my own account of the Davidsonian position. Such entities are ruled out by the indeterminacy of the psychological (see ‘What is Present to the Mind?’, Subjective, pp.16-17) and are, in any case, unnecessary on a properly holistic understanding of the psychological. Consequently, when I talk of intentionality as involving ‘directedness towards an object’, that should not be read as implying any commitment to the reification of such objects as real mental entities. Intentionality, as I employ the notion here, is not a relation that obtains in some ‘inner’ mental realm, which entails some special mental objects, or which relates ‘inner’ mental states with their outer ‘objects’, but primarily describes a structural feature of the projects in which we are engaged. This is one respect in which the emphasis on a Heideggerian rather than Husserlian reading of intentionality accords with my own use of the term.

²² Husserl discusses non-intentional psychological states in Logical Investigations, Vol.11, trans. J. N. Findlay, (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), pp.572-6.

²³ See Dagfinn Føllesdal, ‘Husserl and Heidegger on the Role of Actions in the Constitution of the World’, p.375.

²⁴ See Being and Time, H67ff. For a brief account of some of Heidegger’s criticisms of Husserl’s notion of intentionality see Martin Kusch, Language as Calculus vs. Language as Universal Medium (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp.15-60.

²⁵ This is what Heidegger refers to as the ‘hermeneutical “as”’ in contrast to the ‘apophantic “as”’; see Being and Time, H 158. See also the interesting discussion of this in Mark Okrent, Heidegger’s Pragmatism, pp.52-73.

²⁶ This idea provides the germ for the Heideggerian notion of truth as aletheia that I shall explore further in chapter seven (especially §7.4.2 below).

²⁷ Though this does not mean that there is not a sense in which there is a ‘horizon of horizons’ that stands as the ground for the unity and interconnection of all horizons and all projects – it is this that I discuss in §4.3.2 as the world-horizon.

²⁸ See for instance Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), Section 27, p.102, Section 44, p.138, Section 47, p.149. The horizon is, of course, also open to some determination, though it can never be completely

determined.

²⁹ Ibid., Section 27, p.102.

³⁰ ‘Paradoxes of Irrationality’, p.302. It is an idea which, as Esa Saarinen has pointed out, is also to be found in Sartre: ‘the “meaning” of my expressions always escapes me. I never know exactly if I signify what I wish to signify nor even if I am signifying anything ... For lack of knowing what I actually express for the other, I constitute my language as an incomplete phenomenon of flight outside myself... As soon as I express myself, I can only guess at the meaning of what I express’ (Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1969), p.373) – quoted in Esa Saarinen, ‘Davidson and Sartre’, LePore and McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events, p.460.

³¹ See Alex Hyslop, ‘The Correct Reading of a Literary Work of Art’, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 61 (1983), pp.152-9.

³² See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), B 131ff.

³³ For a more detailed discussion of this issue see my ‘The Constitution of the Mind: Kant and Davidson on the Unity of Consciousness’, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, (1999), pp.1-30.

³⁴ The idea that local systems may ‘nest’ within larger systems appears also in Günther Buck, ‘The Structure of Hermeneutic Experience and the Problem of Tradition’ (New Literary History, 10 (1978), p.37-9) in terms of the idea of horizons being nested within other horizons. Buck gives a good account of the structure of horizontality and of the dynamics of expectation and frustration that is similar to my own.

³⁵ Thus Husserl distinguishes between the inner and outer horizons in an intentional act, see Husserl, Experience and Judgement, ed. Ludwig Landgrabe, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), Section 8, pp.31-38, and also David Woodruff Smith and Ronald MacIntyre, Husserl and Intentionality, pp.256-8.

³⁶ Meaning and the Moral Sciences (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.41. As Putnam acknowledges, the idea of interest relativity originally appears in Alan Garfinkel, Forms of Explanation (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981).

³⁷ Meaning and the Moral Sciences, p.45.

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- ³⁸ For a brief discussion of this matter in Husserl see J. N. Mohanty, The Concept of Intentionality (St Louis, Missouri: Warren H. Green, 1972), pp.123-7. Mohanty talks about the ‘dialectic of intention and fulfilment’. The connection with temporality is especially significant given the role that temporality acquires in Heidegger.
- ³⁹ This is something Dreyfus has discussed in a number of places, but see especially his discussion of Searle in his ‘Responses’ in Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (ed.), Heidegger, Coping and Cognitive Science (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp.323-37; see also ‘The Primacy of Phenomenology over Logical Analysis’, Philosophical Topics 27 (1999), pp.3-24.
- ⁴⁰ Dreyfus derives the essential features of this account from Merleau-Ponty as well as Heidegger, see *ibid.*
- ⁴¹ See J. N. Findlay, Hegel: A Re-examination (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp.58-82. See also Gadamer’s more general discussion in ‘Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers’, Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies, trans. p.Christopher Smith, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), pp.5-34.
- ⁴² See Popper; The Logic of Scientific Discovery (London: Hutchinson, 1959), and Conjectures and Refutations (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp.33ff.
- ⁴³ Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.345.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*
- ⁴⁵ Husserl notes this tendency to immersion in Ideas, Section 28, p.104.
- ⁴⁶ Truth and Method, p.106.
- ⁴⁷ See Truth and Method, pp.101-34. Gadamer analyses the structure of aesthetic, as well as hermeneutic, experience on the basis of this concept of play. From a semiotic perspective, one could say that the tendency towards immersion in projects is essentially a matter of our inevitable immersion in particular sign systems. Such immersion is a necessary consequence of the fact that it is only within sign systems that meanings are constituted. Insofar as we find signs already meaningful, then so we are already drawn into the sign system of which they are a part. Works of fiction – whether in the theatre, film, novel or in other forms – provide particularly interesting examples of how we are indeed ‘drawn into’, and become immersed in, particular, ‘local’, sign systems. They also provide

examples of how texts can be seen as ‘projects’, while also suggesting how ‘projects’ may be read as ‘texts’.

- ⁴⁸ It is this feature of ‘immersion’ Heidegger discusses in Being and Time when he points to the way in which the objects being employed in carrying out some project always disappear into the project itself. Thus the hammer goes unnoticed in its actual use and only ‘appears’ when it no longer functions properly. See Being and Time, H73-76, H81, H354-355.
- ⁴⁹ Thus Heidegger argues that Dasein has an inevitable tendency to ‘lose itself’ in the everyday practical activities in which it is involved and in the common world in which those activities are situated. In this way, Dasein misidentifies itself and misunderstands its own character.
- ⁵⁰ The features I have discussed here – notably the tendency towards immersion in projects – are also discussed by J. Huizinga in Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) as characteristic features of play. See Homo Ludens, pp.11-13, and, more generally, pp.1-27. Gadamer also discusses these features – using Huizinga’s analysis as his starting point – in Truth and Method, pp.101ff.
- ⁵¹ ‘What is it like to be a bat?’, Mortal Questions, p.166.
- ⁵² Thomas Nagel treats the subjective aspect of intentionality as the aspect that is most resistant to reduction. See Nagel, ‘What is it like to be a bat’, pp.165-80 and ‘Subjective and Objective’, Mortal Questions, p.201.
- ⁵³ Nagel, *ibid.*, pp.169-70.
- ⁵⁴ Thus Gadamer emphasizes the character of understanding and interpretation as a matter of the ‘fusion of horizons’ between interpreter and interpretee – see §3.4.4 above.
- ⁵⁵ On the concepts of ‘dialogue’, ‘conversation’, and ‘question and answer’, see Truth and Method, pp.362-88.
- ⁵⁶ See ‘A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs’, p.442.
- ⁵⁷ See Lewis, ‘Languages and Language’, and also Convention: A Philosophical Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969). See also the discussion in Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, pp.100-13. Ian Hacking comments on ‘A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs’, in ‘The Parody of Conversation’, LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.447 -58.

⁵⁸ Hacking, 'The Parody of Conversation', pp.445-6. On this general topic see also Davidson's paper

'Communication and Convention', Inquiries, pp.265-80.

⁵⁹This point is also developed by Bjørn Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.xxvff. See also Davidson's comments in 'The Social Aspect of Language'.

⁶⁰ The central role of temporality is, of course, the primary theme of Heidegger's Being and Time.

⁶¹ The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, p.264. It is, of course, only in this later phase of Husserl's thinking that the idea of the world-horizon becomes prominent. This idea of the world as the horizon for our projects also appears in Heidegger. Thus, in Being and Time, the world is understood, in part, as 'that wherein a factual Dasein can be said to "live"' (Being and Time, H65) and thus as the overall context of intelligibility within which particular objects – encountered primarily in their instrumental character – are enmeshed. The world is thus constituted as a matrix of interrelations. As William Richardson comments, in discussing Heidegger: 'The World is a Wherein. This is not to be understood spatially but as a horizon within which an instrument is encountered by There-being (Dasein). Hence it is a Wherein in which both There-being and instruments reside' (Richardson, Heidegger – Through Phenomenology to Thought, p.56, see also pp.52-8).

⁶² That they involve different horizons does not mean that they cannot come into conflict. Indeed each may construct the other as an opponent within the horizon of their own project. A particularly good example here is William Blake's attitude to Isaac Newton. See Donald Ault, Visionary Physics. Blake's Response to Newton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁶³ The ambiguity of 'world' in this respect is noted by Heidegger, Being and Time, H64-5.

⁶⁴ Of course, the world as it appears in our practical involvement with it – that is, in terms of our physical involvement with our environment – must always have a certain priority over the world in its other aspects. This is a crucial feature of Heidegger's account apparent in his emphasis, in Being and Time, on equipmentality. It is also part of what is involved in his emphasis on the phenomenon of everydayness. Thus: 'This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in

which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a “world-in-itself”, so that it just beholds what it encounters’ (Being and Time, H169). The everyday world is the familiar, socialized world of the community at large, but it is also the world of our everyday practical involvements.

⁶⁵ Quoted by Rorty, ‘Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy’, Consequences of Pragmatism: essays 1972-1980 (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1982), p.xxxv.

⁶⁶ Troilus and Cressida, III. iii. 115-20; quoted by Davidson in ‘Thought and Talk’, Inquiries, p.170.

⁶⁷ Michael Murray discusses the concept of world as comprising three basic elements: horizon, ground and measure – ‘Hermeneutics of the World’, pp.98-104. My account of world focuses on the notion of world as horizon, but the notion of horizon can also be taken to imply the notion of world as ground. This is partly because the horizon arises out of and expresses our grounded-ness or locatedness. But we are also constituted as persons in terms of our relation with other persons and objects within various local horizons as well as within, and with respect to, the ultimate horizon of the world. In this latter respect the world as horizon also gives rise to the notion of world as ground. Murray’s notion of the world as measure concerns the world as representing ‘a higher than human reality, that is, a domain in some fashion transcendent and more enduring than mortals’ (ibid., p.100). This aspect of the world is not something I shall deal with here.

⁶⁸ The connection between the world-horizon and the requirement of the principle of charity that we should assume speakers to have mostly true beliefs suggests a connection between the idea of the world-horizon and the notion of truth itself which will become increasingly important. See particularly §7.4.

⁶⁹ See Husserl, The Crisis of European Phenomenology and Transcendental Phenomenology, p.168. See also Heidegger, Being and Time, H41ff.

Notes to Chapter Five

¹ Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, p.69.

² Ramberg has another reason for being unhappy with the treatment of charity in terms of agreement. He claims that: ‘if we take the extensional and holistic nature of our theorizing seriously, we are committed to articulating the assumptions that guide us without intentional concepts like “belief”,

“agreement” and so on. We should also find a way of clearly articulating the problem the principle [of charity] is intended to solve, the inseparability of meaning and belief, in non-intentional terms’ (ibid., pp.71-2). While Ramberg’s account of charity is very similar to my own presentation of the principle, unlike Ramberg, I am not concerned to purge my account of concepts such as ‘belief’ and ‘agreement’, and much more concerned to maintain a tight connection between charity, agreement and truth in the light of the overall holism of the psychological. Indeed, the holistic nature of the psychological would seem to suggest that there is no way concepts such as ‘belief’ can be eliminated. Certainly Davidson does not himself suggest that we should do away with such concepts – see, for instance, ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, p.324.

³ Ramberg, Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language, pp.77-8.

⁴ Ibid

⁵In fact, the Tarskian model can itself be seen as, in part, an embodiment of holism, insofar as that model expresses the crucial connection between truth and meaning. In this respect the Tarskian constraints represent, to some extent, the formalization of the holistic assumptions also contained in the principle of charity.

⁶ See: Colin McGinn, ‘Charity, Interpretation and Belief’, Journal of Philosophy, 74 (1977); Graham Macdonald and Philip Pettit, Semantics and Social Science, pp.20 and 29-31; Michael Devitt, Realism and Truth, pp.173-4 and Designation, pp.115-18. Devitt does moderate his criticism somewhat. While he labels some Davidsonian versions of charity ‘crude’ he also says that ‘Davidson’s later statements of the principle [of charity] are more subtle: they allow the possibility of some explicable error... However, they still remain too strong’ (Designation, p.115).

⁷ See ‘Reference, Meaning and Belief’, Journal of Philosophy, 70 (1973), pp.439-52.

⁸ Grandy, ‘Reference, Meaning and Belief’, p.445.

⁹ Ibid., p.443.

¹⁰ Semantics and Social Science, p.29.

¹¹ Ibid., p.31.

¹² ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, Subjective, p.138.

¹³ ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.196. See also ‘Belief and the Basis of Meaning’, Inquiries, p.152 and ‘Replies to Lewis and Quine’, Inquiries, p.282.

¹⁴ See Kim Sterelny, ‘Davidson on Truth and Reference’, Southern Journal of Philosophy, 19 (1981). p.109
Sterelny refers to David Bloor's ‘Knowledge and Social Imagery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976). See also Barry Barnes and David Bloor, ‘Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge’, in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (eds.), Rationality and Relativism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp.21-47.

¹⁵ See ‘Charity, Interpretation and Belief’, p.527. Rom Harré argues for a similar autonomy of reference in defending a realist approach to science. See Harré, Varieties of Realism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), chapter 4, ‘Referring as a Material Practice’, pp.100-7.

¹⁶ See especially Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity.

¹⁷ Realism and Truth, p.174.

¹⁸ ‘Davidson on Truth and Reference’, p.105.

¹⁹ ‘Substances Without Substrata’, p.529.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.532. Similar accounts are to be found in the work of Strawson, Searle and Frege.

²¹ ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, Subjective, p.151 n. 7.

²² Rorty, ‘Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth’, p.340.

²³ See ‘Reality Without Reference’, Inquiries, pp.215-25.

²⁴ In fact even Hilary Putnam seems to accept something of the intuition that lies behind the Davidsonian insistence on charity. In ‘The Meaning of “Meaning”’ (p. 248) Putnam writes: ‘Suppose our hypothetical speaker points to a snowball and asks “is that a tiger?”. Clearly there is no point in talking tigers with him. Significant communication requires that people know something of what they are talking about’. See also Putnam, Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Vol.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.193ff.

²⁵ In a paper in Dialectica 42 (1988), especially pp.30-1, I talked about charity as having two aspects: as a methodological maxim and as an ontological presupposition. These two aspects correspond to the methodological and more fundamental presuppositional aspects discussed here. But whereas in the Dialectica paper I treated both as aspects of the same principle of charity, I now prefer to distinguish

the two, identifying the principle of charity as primarily a methodological principle that is grounded in the presuppositions of a shared world and community and where the ‘sharing’ at issue is a matter of common interaction rather than common ‘description’. This would also seem to fit with Davidson’s own development of the idea of triangulation.

²⁶ The Shaping of Man (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp.xiii and xviii.

²⁷ Semantics and Social Science, p.31.

²⁸ ‘Reference, Meaning and Belief’, p.443.

²⁹ This point is also important in Gadamerian hermeneutics – see my ‘Gadamer, Davidson and the Ground of Understanding’, pp.208-12. On Gadamer’s employment of the idea of dialogue or conversation, see Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.367-79 & 383-5.

³⁰ As Martin Hollis suggests; see ‘Reason and Ritual’ and ‘The Limits of Irrationality’, in Bryan Wilson (ed.), Rationality (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp.221-39 and 214-20. Since first order logic is assumed by the Tarskian approach, so Davidson takes the view that all languages will that same basic logical structure – although, as Davidson himself notes, in the application to natural languages, the Tarskian approach, and the constraints that come with it, including those of formal logic, will lose much of their precision.

³¹ ‘Reply to Kirk Ludwig’, in Urszula M. Żegleń, Donald Davidson. Truth, meaning and knowledge (London: Routledge, 1999), p.47.

³² Truth and Method, p.388.

³³ ‘Communication and Convention’, Inquiries, p.278. In ‘Gadamer and Plato’s Philebus’, p.431-2, Davidson notes his overall agreement with Gadamer, but also takes issue with him on the idea that, to quote from Gadamer, ‘Every conversation presupposes a common language, or it creates a common language’ (Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.378 – Davidson quotes the passage slightly differently – apparently using the first edition of the English translation, reading ‘or it creates a common language’ for ‘or better, creates a common language’). In fact, the disagreement here is more apparent than real – see my discussion in ‘Gadamer, Davidson and the Ground of Understanding’, pp.209-210.

³⁴ Ibid

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- ³⁵ ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.198.
- ³⁶ ‘Epistemology Without Foundations’, in A. I. Holland (ed.), Philosophy, Its History and Historiography (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p.57.
- ³⁷ Although Karl Popper makes an interesting challenge to the idea in ‘The Myth of the Framework’, in Eugene Freeman (ed.), The Abdication of Philosophy: Philosophy and the Public Good (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976), pp.23-48. In fact, I think Popper’s argument here can be read in a way that is suggestive of similarities with Davidson’s position in ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’.
- ³⁸ Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.149.
- ³⁹ George MacDonald Ross, ‘Angels’, Philosophy, 60 (1985), p.500.
- ⁴⁰ ‘Toward a Unified Theory of Meaning and Action’, Grazer Philosophische Studien, 2 (1980), p.7.
- ⁴¹ Ibid
- ⁴² ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.197.
- ⁴³ See Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Primitive Mentality.
- ⁴⁴ ‘Symbolism and Literalism in Anthropology’, Synthèse, 52 (1982), pp.233-65.
- ⁴⁵ ‘Introduction’, Inquiries, p.xix.
- ⁴⁶ See David B. Wang, Moral Relativity (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp.112-14. Michael Devitt also argues that explanation is more important than charity – Devitt, Realism and Truth, pp.175-6.
- ⁴⁷ Word and Object, p.20.
- ⁴⁸ The others being simplicity, fecundity, scope, and observational confirmation. See ‘Posits and Reality’, The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays (New York: Random House, 1966), p.247.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. Compare this with the analogous passage in Word and Object, pp.17-21.
- ⁵⁰ ‘Conventionalism and the Indeterminacy of Translation’, in Davidson and Hintikka (eds.), Words and Objections, pp.87 and 93.
- ⁵¹ The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p.159. See also Rorty’s comments on this passage in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp.327-8.

⁵² On this matter see also Paul Feyerabend, Against Method (London: New Left Books, 1975)

Feyerabend's 'epistemological anarchism' has the virtue of being opposed to any dogmatic or mechanical approach to the discovery or evaluation of scientific theories.

⁵³ 'Psychology as Philosophy: Comments and Replies', Essays, p.243.

⁵⁴ Truth and Method, p.389.

⁵⁵ See Word and Object, p.20.

⁵⁶ 'Identity, Ostension and Hypostasis', in From a Logical Point of View, pp.78-9.

⁵⁷ In, for instance, Word and Object, pp.3 and 24 and 'Mental Entities', in The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays, p.223.

⁵⁸ Word and Object, p.4.

⁵⁹ As psychological holism can be seen to imply a conception of understanding as something like 'familiarization', so it connects up with ideas within the philosophy of science according to which scientific explanation is a matter of redescribing the unfamiliar and puzzling in familiar terms. In its cruder forms this notion has been subjected to some sharp criticism, but the idea has gained plausibility with consideration of the role of metaphor and modeling in scientific thinking (see, for instance, Ernest Nagel, The Structure of Science (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) pp.45-6 and 114-15; and Mary Hesse, Models and Analogies in Science (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1966).) Familiarization is a way of maintaining and developing psychological connectedness. While holism favors such connectedness, however, it places no specific constraints on how such connectedness is actually maintained. Consequently the idea that understanding is always a matter of familiarization means only that there has to be some connection between the new and the familiar.

⁶⁰ 'The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem', in Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p.15.

⁶¹ Though this is not to say that it may not be constituted holistically – it is just that it will be a different form of holism.

⁶² 'Psychology as Philosophy', Essays, p.231.

⁶³ See, for instance, Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy', in Krausz (ed.), Relativism: Confrontation and Interpretation, especially pp.197-8; and George MacDonald Ross, 'Angels', pp.500-1.

⁶⁴ 'Relativism, Rationality and the Sociology of Knowledge', p.37.

⁶⁵ Word and Object, p.71.

⁶⁶ Stephen Mullhall makes a similar objection in the context of a lengthy discussion of Davidson in On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.101-4. Many of Mullhall's criticisms reiterate those of Ian Hacking, 'The Parody of Conversation', pp.447-58.

⁶⁷ See the discussion in 6.2 below.

⁶⁸ 'Radical Interpretation', Inquiries, p.125.

⁶⁹ Hacking, 'The Parody of Conversation', p.451. Stephen Mullhall comments in similar fashion (though with an emphasis on the ubiquity of interpretation in Davidson) that 'At the very beginning of. ... "Radical Interpretation" ... we are presented with a German uttering a sentence in German, and it would seem natural to say that we are interpreting such an utterance when we say what it means in English ... This does not, however, license us to regard a fellow-German's comprehension of Kurt's utterance as being the product of interpretation, precisely because Kurt's utterance is not in a language foreign to his compatriot. To say to a German "Es regnet" just is to say "It is raining" and once the gap is closed, there is no room for the concept of interpretation because there is no reason for presupposing the need for a redescription of the utterance' (On Being in the World, pp.102-3).

⁷⁰ Hacking, 'The Parody of Conversation', p.451.

⁷¹ Certainly Dummett reads Hacking as taking this view of Davidson's position. See Michael Dummett, 'Comments on Davidson and Hacking', in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, p.464.

⁷² See 'Holism and Hermeneutics', pp.3-23.

⁷³ See Stephen Mullhall, On Being in the World, pp.101ff; Gordon Baker 'Following Wittgenstein: Some Signposts for Philosophical Investigations Sections 143-242', in Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich (eds.), Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.66. Much of the opposition to any such interpretative view of understanding looks to the later

Wittgenstein – this is so for Mullhall as well as for Baker and others. Michael Dummett quotes Wittgenstein’s comment that ‘there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation’ (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §201) adding that ‘Similarly, there is a way of understanding a sentence or an utterance that does not consist in putting an interpretation on it’ (Dummett, ‘Comments on Davidson and Hacking’, p.464). For more on this idea in Wittgenstein see Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker, An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp.258-83. For Davidson’s own reply to Dummett, see ‘The Social Aspect of Language.

⁷⁴ ‘A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs’, p.438.

⁷⁵ ‘The Material Mind’, Essays, p.256.

⁷⁶ Though perhaps we could view such theoretical structures as sometimes making up part of the Husserlian ‘internal’ horizon.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Pettit and Macdonald, Semantics and Social Science, pp.150-79 and S. L. Hurley, ‘Objectivity and Disagreement’, in Ted Honderich (ed.), Morality and Objectivity; A Tribute to J. L. Mackie (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985), pp.54-97. See also the discussion in Bill Martin, ‘The Moral Atmosphere: Language and Value in Davidson’, Southwestern Philosophy Review 6 (1990), pp.89-97 and ‘Interpretation and Responsibility: Excavating Davidson’s Ethical Theory’, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, pp.345-56, as well as Davidson’s own reply to the latter paper, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, pp.357-60.

⁷⁸ As worked out in a number of papers, notably, ‘How is Weakness of the Will Possible?’, Essays, pp.21-42, ‘Incoherence and Irrationality’, Dialectica, 39 (1985), pp.345-54, ‘Deception and Division’, in E. LePore and B. McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp.138-48, ‘Who is Fooled?’, in J.-P. Dupuy (ed.), Self-Deception and Paradoxes of Rationality (Stanford: CSLI, 1997), pp.15-27 and ‘Paradoxes of Irrationality’. For a useful discussion of this issue, see, Ariela Lazar, ‘Akrasia and the Principle of Continence’, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, pp.381-401, as well as Davidson’s reply, in Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, pp.402-5.

⁷⁹ Thus Davidson comments that in interpreting a speaker ‘we will try for a theory that finds him consistent, a believer of truths, and a lover of the good (all by our own lights, it goes without saying) – ‘Mental Events’, Essays, p.222.

⁸⁰ ‘Objectivity and Practical Reason’, in Edna Ullmann-Margalit (ed.), Reasoning Practically (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.25, see also ‘The Objectivity of Values’, in Carlos Gutiérrez (ed.), El Trabajo Filosófico de Hoy en el Continente (Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1995), pp.56-69.

⁸¹ Emphasis on dialogue and negotiation as essential to ethical life clearly fits with, for instance, forms of Rawlsian and Habermasian accounts of ethics that have arisen over recent years. It also coheres with Gadamer’s hermeneutical approach to the general field of our understanding and engagement with others, including the field of practical engagement.

Notes to Chapter Six

¹ ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, p.163.

² ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.189.

³ Discussion of Davidson’s argument in ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’ has been bedeviled by at least two tendencies on the part of critics. The first is to read Davidson’s account here in a way largely uninformed by knowledge or understanding of the rest of Davidson’s corpus (a problem that undermines the work of many would-be Davidsonian commentators and critics). This means, for instance, that many critics miss the way in which the attack on the scheme/content distinction is actually an instance of Davidson’s more general attack on the ‘myth’ of the subjective. The second is to read that account in a way that already assumes its necessary falsity. Because the scheme/content distinction is indeed so widely and uncritically accepted, there is a strong tendency to view any denial of the viability of the distinction as mistaken and confused right from the start. Michael N. Forster, ‘On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes’, Inquiry 41 (1998), pp.133-85, provides an excellent example of both these tendencies.

⁴ Quine, ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, p.41.

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- ⁵‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.189; see also ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, Subjective, pp.41-2.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp.189-91 The extent to which Davidson is correct in his attribution of the scheme/content idea to these thinkers is, of course, open to debate.
- ⁷See ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’; see also the much earlier paper ‘Truth by Convention’, in The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays, pp.70-99.
- ⁸ ‘True to the Facts’, Inquiries, p.194.
- ⁹Ibid
- ¹⁰ See especially ‘What is Present to the Mind’ and also ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’.
- ¹¹ Indeed, Davidson is committed, as we have already seen, to a notion of the world as objective – though it is a notion tied, in my own account, to the notion of the world-horizon (see §3.4.3 and §4.3.2). On some of the ambiguities associated with the notion of objectivity (and some of the problems) see John McDowell, ‘Aesthetic value, objectivity and the fabric of the world’, in Eva Schaper (ed.), Pleasure, Preference and Value. Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.1-16.
- ¹² See ‘Knowing One’s Own Mind’, Subjective, p.29 and ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, Subjective, pp.45-47.
- ¹³ This is often taken to mean that the horizon is not propositional or conceptual, and that it cannot therefore be given any propositional or conceptual characterisation at all, but this is clearly mistaken – as the discussions of propositionality and concepts in earlier chapters should have indicated
- ¹⁴ ‘The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions’, The Monist, 51(1967), p.325. See also Körner’s Categorial Frameworks (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).
- ¹⁵Nicholas Rescher, ‘Conceptual Schemes’, in P. A. French, T. E. Uehling Jr, and H. K. Wettstein (eds.), Midwest Studies in Philosophy 6: Foundations of Analytic Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1981), p.330.
- ¹⁶ Indeed, as we saw earlier (see §4.2.1), Heidegger’s critique of the Husserlian notion of intentionality involved the claim that Husserl treated the notion on too theoretical a model.
- ¹⁷See for instance Nicholas Rescher, ‘Conceptual Schemes’ and also Michael N. Forster, ‘On the Very Idea

of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes’.

¹⁸ ‘The Myth of the Subjective’, p.40.

¹⁹ See Wilfrid Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. this issue is also taken up by John McDowell in Mind and World (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.50-65.

²⁰ ‘The Age of the World Picture’, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p.129.

²¹ See especially ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in The Question Concerning Technology, pp.3-35.

²² ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.183.

²³ Paul Kay and Willett Kempton suggest that this is how Whorf’s thesis of linguistic relativity should be read – see Kay and Kempton, ‘What is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?’, American Anthropologist, 86 (1984), pp.65-79.

²⁴ Moreover relativism so often regarded by philosophers as infected with self-refuting paradox – need not represent the only logical alternative to ethnocentrism and has itself been criticised as an ethnocentric notion. See John Cook, ‘Cultural Relativism as an ethnocentric notion’, in Roger Beehler and Alan Drengson (eds.), The Philosophy of Society (London: Methuen, 1978), p.289.

²⁵ Gerald Doppelt, ‘Kuhn’s Epistemological Relativism: An Interpretation and Defense’, Inquiry, 21 (1978), pp.33-86. See also Richard Bernstein’s discussion in Beyond Objectivism and Relativism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp.79-91.

²⁶ See Kuhn, ‘Postscript’, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p.202, and also Feyerabend’s discussion of the ‘anthropological method’ in Against Method (London: New Left Books, 1975). See also Bernstein’s comments, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, pp.91-2.

²⁷ Note that talk of different ‘worlds’ or different ‘discourses’ can serve the same purpose as does talk of differing schemes or languages. See, for instance, Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1978).

²⁸ ‘The Inscrutability of Reference’, Inquiries, p.240.

²⁹ ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, pp.197-8; see also ‘Psychology as Philosophy:

Comments and Replies', Essays, p.243.

- ³⁰ On this see John Wallace, 'Translation Theories and the Decipherment of Linear B', in LePore (ed.), Truth and Interpretation, pp.21 1-34 and Bruce Vermazen's reply in the same volume, 'Testing Theories of Interpretation', pp.235-44. See also Ramberg's discussion of these two articles in Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.66-8.
- ³¹ For a more detailed discussion of untranslatability see my 'The Intertranslatability of Natural Languages', Synthèse 78 (1989), pp.233-64; also Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.119-25.
- ³² 'The Myth of the Subjective', Subjective, p.40.
- ³³ In Inquiries, pp.227-41. The following section is a somewhat abbreviated version of the discussion in my 'Ontological Relativity in Quine and Davidson', in Brandl and Gombocz (eds.), The Mind of Donald Davidson, pp.157-78.
- ³⁴ Quine discusses the difference between the inscrutability thesis and the indeterminacy thesis proper in 'On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation'. Quine sets out the thesis of ontological relativity in 'Ontological Relativity'.
- ³⁵ See 'Ontological Relativity', p.48.
- ³⁶ 'The Inscrutability of Reference', Inquiries, pp.232-34.
- ³⁷ 'Ontological Relativity', p.49.
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ Ibid., pp.49-50.
- ⁴⁰ 'The Inscrutability of Reference', Inquiries, p.227.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p.239, see also p.238.
- ⁴² The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p.150.
- ⁴³ Though the Kuhnian notion of a paradigm also seems to contain elements that I might treat as properly part of the horizon. The distinction between the horizon and the projects constituted within it will not, in any case, always be clear-cut.
- ⁴⁴ See Ramberg, Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.129-34.

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- ⁴⁵ See Bernard Williams, 'The Truth in Relativism', Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.132-43. See also Williams' discussion in Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy, (London: Fontana, 1985), pp.156-73.
- ⁴⁶ In the work of Jakob Meløe, notions of community and world, in their local applications, are interwoven with a discussion of the nature of human activity and involvements. See Meløe, 'The Agent and his World'.
- ⁴⁷ J. N. Mohanty suggests similarities between Davidson and Husserl's responses to relativism which reflect similarities in my own account. See Mohanty, 'Phenomenological Rationality and the Overcoming of Relativism' in Krausz (ed.), Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation, pp.326-38 especially pp.327-30.
- ⁴⁸ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.309.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p.319.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.311. This line of argument echoes Wilfrid Sellars' criticisms of Locke. See Sellars, Science, Perception and Reality (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp.157-61.
- ⁵¹ See 'Empirical Content', p.322 and pp.324-7. Davidson refers to Neurath's paper 'Protocol Sentences', Erkenntnis, 3 (1932-3), quoting from the translation in A. J. Ayer (ed.), Logical Positivism (New York: Free Press, 1959), pp.199-208.
- ⁵² 'Empirical Content', Subjective, p.173.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ See 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', Essays, pp.3-20
- ⁵⁵ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.145, n. 5.
- ⁵⁶ 'Epistemology Naturalized', p.83.
- ⁵⁷ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.144.
- ⁵⁸ 'Epistemology Naturalized', p.71.
- ⁵⁹ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.144.
- ⁶⁰ 'Epistemology Naturalized', p.71.
- ⁶¹ Ibid

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- ⁶² McGinn, 'The Third Dogma of Empiricism', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (New Series), 82 (1981-2), pp.98ff.
- ⁶³ 'The Myth of the Subjective', Subjective, p.46.
- ⁶⁴ Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, p.10.
- ⁶⁵ 'Afterthoughts, 1987' (appended to the end of 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' in response to Richard Rorty's comments on the paper), Subjective, p.156-7.
- ⁶⁶ Davidson adds, parenthetically, 'Remember the brain in the vat' ('A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.145).
- ⁶⁷ See Dummett, 'What Is a Theory of Meaning? I' and 'What is a Theory of Meaning? II', in Evans and McDowell (eds.), Truth and Meaning, pp.67-137, for Dummett's criticisms of Davidson's approach to the theory of meaning.
- ⁶⁸ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', pp.144-5. See also 'Afterthoughts, 1987', Subjective, p.156.
- ⁶⁹ The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.248.
- ⁷⁰ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Subjective, p.146.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid., p.150.
- ⁷³ One repeated by Jerry Fodor in his review article of Davidson's Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective, 'Mouse Thoughts', London Review of Books, 7 March 2002, pp.12-14.
- ⁷⁴ 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', Inquiries, p.201. It seems likely that Davidson's use of the idea of the omniscient interpreter has its origins in Wilfrid Sellars' use of a similar idea in 'Realism and the New Way of Words', in Feigl and Sellars (eds.), Readings in Philosophical Analysis, pp.426-9.
- ⁷⁵ See, for instance, Bruce Vermazen, 'The Intelligibility of Massive Error', The Philosophical Quarterly, 33 (1983), pp.69-74; Stig Aistrup Rasmussen, 'The Intelligibility of Abortive Omniscience', The Philosophical Quarterly, 37 (1987), pp.315-9; also R. Foley and R. Fumerton, 'Davidson's Theism', Philosophical Studies, 48 (1985), pp.83-9. Davidson has commented in lectures and in conversation that this is one argument, along with the famous 'Swampman' example, that he regrets ever having formulated.

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- ⁷⁶ ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, Subjective, p.150.
- ⁷⁷ The anomalous nature of the mental rules out the possibility that omniscience about the world – about the physical – is sufficient to ensure omniscience about the mental.
- ⁷⁸ I therefore disagree with the claim made by C. J. A. M. Janssens and J. van Brakel that ‘the concept of an [omniscient interpreter] is not only intelligible within Davidson’s philosophy, but in fact may form part of the central core of his theory of interpretation’ (‘Davidson’s Omniscient Interpreter’, Communication and Cognition, 23 [1990], p.98).
- ⁷⁹ ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, Subjective, p.150.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.152-3.
- ⁸¹ Davidson, ‘Empirical Content’, Subjective, p.173. Of course, matters are complicated a little, insofar as some events may be identical with beliefs, and so may be given descriptions under which they operate as reasons.
- ⁸² Subjective, pp.155-6
- ⁸³ ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’, pp.298 and 305-6 especially n. 47.
- ⁸⁴ ‘The Third Dogma of Empiricism’, p.96.
- ⁸⁵ In the Tractatus Wittgenstein writes ‘doubt can only exist where a question exists; a question can only exist where an answer exists, and this can only exist where something can be said’ (Tractatus-Logico Philosophicos, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), Section 6.51). Much of the central argument in On Certainty likewise consists in the notion that doubting always presupposes a wider background where doubt does not arise. (Although, as the background changes, so too may what is doubted also change.) Thus ‘Our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like the hinges on which those turn (Wittgenstein, On Certainty, ed. G.E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), Section 341). And so ‘the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty’ (*ibid.*, Section 115).
- ⁸⁶ ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, pp.317-18.
- ⁸⁷ Davidson has sometimes commented that his commitment to externalism goes back a long way. In commenting on papers at a conference in Aix-en-Provence in 1999, he quipped ‘I have been an

externalist since 1959. I was converted to it by Quine. Unfortunately I failed to convert Quine’.

⁸⁸ Indeed, Simon Evnine, for instance, suggests that there are serious difficulties in combining Davidsonian considerations of ‘holism and normativity’ with considerations about the likely causes of a speaker’s beliefs (Evnine, Donald Davidson, p.149-51). Evnine seems not fully to appreciate the extent to which holism can be viewed as the basis for both these sorts of considerations. Evnine does note, however, that there are some complications in Davidson’s understanding of the way in which the causes of belief are relevant to identifying the objects of belief. In particular he suggests that the notion of ‘causation’ might be misleading here since ‘Davidson seems to be after a much more primitive relation of contact’ (Donald Davidson, p.150-1). Such a comment is all too suggestive in the light of my own account of the Davidsonian position – see especially the discussion below in chapter seven (§7.4).

⁸⁹ There is a clear similarity between foundationalism of this sort and the foundationalism that is also to be found in the later Wittgenstein. See Jonathan Dancy’s brief discussion of Wittgenstein as a foundationalist in his Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp.82-3 and also Gertrude D. Conway, Wittgenstein on Foundations (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1989).

⁹⁰ Rorty, ‘Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth’. p.340.

⁹¹ This difficulty is rather like that faced by proponents of symbolic interpretative strategies in anthropology. Symbolists would interpret those utterances of native speakers that refer to supernatural entities – gods, demons, spirits etc. as utterances which should not be taken literally. They are symbolic or metaphorical utterances that can be ‘translated’ into more mundane statements concerning the duties and attitudes of the speakers. The problem, of course, is that native speakers will typically dissent from such an interpretation of their utterances forcing the symbolist to adopt an auxiliary hypothesis to account for such dissent. That there is a connection between the symbolist strategy in anthropology and the externalist strategy being considered here is suggested by Richard Rorty (it is also suggested by the Wittgensteinian background to much symbolist thinking) in his comment that the Davidsonian strategy will be ‘the analogue of construing most native remarks as

about, e. g., rocks and diseases rather than about trolls and demons', 'Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth', p.340.

⁹² 'Knowing One's Own Mind', Subjective, p.22-3.

⁹³ In 'Davidson and the Skeptic: the Thumbnail Version', Analysis 50, (1990), pp.213-12, Edward Craig attempts to use this point (though without noting its appearance in Davidson's own work) as an argument to rebut Davidson's omniscient interpreter argument; see also my 'Self-knowledge and Scepticism'.

⁹⁴ See 'What is Present to the Mind', pp.8-18; 'Knowing One's Own Mind', pp.441-56; and 'The Myth of the Subjective', p.161-4. Davidson emphasizes that while we generally do need to look to the objects that are the causes of belief in order to determine what beliefs are about, that need not imply that the speaker knows anything about those objects. The objects we look to in order to interpret a speaker do not have to be 'objects of thought' for that speaker. To assume this would be to remain within a 'representationalist' frame of thinking that Davidson rejects.

⁹⁵ That belief cannot be treated in this fashion – that we cannot abstract off a 'total' theory of belief – and that there is, therefore, no way of even making sense of the idea of the total set of our beliefs, let alone of comparing them with some independent reality, is a conclusion that Davidson himself, however, never explicitly draws. It is, nevertheless, a conclusion pointed out by Michael Williams in his discussion of Davidson's anti-skeptical position, see Williams, 'Skepticism and Charity', Ratio (New Series), 1(1988), p.188. Williams argues that Davidson fails to draw the appropriate conclusion here, because Davidson remains unclear on the true extent of his holism in respect to belief. Certainly the force of Davidson's anti-skeptical arguments often seems to be obscured just to the extent that the holistic ground of those arguments is sometimes unclear.

⁹⁶ Martin Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975), p.165. See also Being and Time, H205 and H202-7.

⁹⁷ The same objection might be directed at Davidson's use of the principle of charity. Thus Kim Sterelny refers to the principle as itself 'a species of verificationism' ('Davidson on Truth and Reference', Southern Journal of Philosophy, 19 (1981), p.109).

⁹⁸ See Stroud, 'Transcendental Arguments', Journal of Philosophy, 65 (1968), pp.242-56; also Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'Private Languages', American Philosophical Quarterly, 1 (1964), pp.203-1; Richard Rorty, 'Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments', Nous, 5 (1971), pp.3-14. See also Peter Hacker, 'Are Transcendental Arguments a Version of Verificationism?', American Philosophical Quarterly, 9 (1972), pp.78-88. Stroud's paper, which was directed at Strawson's Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (London: Methuen, 1959) as well as Sydney Shoemaker's Self Knowledge and Self Identity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), provoked an enormous spate of papers, in the early 1970's, on transcendental argument.

⁹⁹ 'In Defence of Convention T', Inquiries, p.72. Davidson does not present the actual argument here, but, in a footnote, directs the reader to 'On the Very Idea of A Conceptual Scheme' and 'On the Method of Truth in Metaphysics'. Elsewhere Davidson has been much more reticent about such a characterization – see 'Reply to Andrew Cutrofello', in Hahn [ed.], The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, pp.342-4. Part of the reason for the reticence is, I suspect, that 'transcendental' is so often employed, in analytic circles, as an essentially pejorative term, and so characterizing Davidson's position as 'transcendental' is often associated with a hostile response to that position – this is the case in Cutrofello's discussion while, although they put no weight on the point, Fodor and LePore also take it more or less for granted that Davidson's position is transcendental (see Holism: A Shopper's Guide, p.105). Moreover, while a certain understanding of the transcendental is often assumed, there is a real question as to how the transcendental should properly be understood (see my 'Introduction' to Malpas (ed.), From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the Idea of the Transcendental [London: Routledge, 2003], pp.1-6 as well as the articles that follow). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Davidson has been unwilling to tie his position to a concept that is not only viewed with hostility by many, but which is also somewhat obscure.

¹⁰⁰ See Cohn McGinn, 'Charity, Interpretation and Belief', p.522; Richard Rorty, 'Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference and Pragmatism', in p.Bieri, R.-P. Horstmann and L. Kriger (eds.), Transcendental Arguments and Science (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), pp.95-9; Hilary Putnam, 'Philosophers and Human Understanding', Realism and Reason, pp.191-6 (especially p.196). Often Davidson's arguments are taken as transcendental because they are seen as providing an a priori

justification of the principle of charity. On this reading, the arguments aim to show that the possibility of interpretation is predicated on the charitable assumptions of overall agreement (in the case of relativism) or overall truth (in the case of skepticism) holding true. Charity is thereby exhibited as a ‘transcendental presupposition’ of the possibility of interpretation and communication. For an argument in this style, see Martin Hollis, ‘Reason and Ritual’, p.230. Andrew Carpenter provides a detailed discussion of Davidson’s ‘transcendentalism’ in ‘Davidson’s Transcendental Argumentation’, in Malpas (ed), From Kant to Davidson, pp.219-37. On the transcendental elements in Gadamer and Heidegger, see my ‘Gadamer, Davidson and the Ground of Understanding’, in Malpas et al (eds.), Gadamer’s Century, pp.195-216, and ‘From the transcendental to the “topological”’: Heidegger on ground, unity and limit’, in Malpas (ed), From Kant to Davidson, pp.75-99.

¹⁰¹ The view of transcendental arguments that is implied here – that they aim at demonstrating the horizontal ground for experience or discourse either in general or in particular cases – is supported by the way in which transcendental arguments seem to be employed in a variety of contexts. Heidegger suggests such a reading of the Kantian project in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), see especially pp.46-59. Similarly, in Wittgenstein. we find a form of transcendental argument which looks to establish the incoherence of skepticism by showing that the skeptic’s own doubts require a wider context – what is, in my terms, a wider horizon – within which, and only within which, they make sense. But that wider horizon itself presupposes just what the skeptic would cast in doubt. Such a style of argument is clearest in On Certainty. Rudiger Bubner suggests that there is a similar notion of the transcendental in the early Wittgenstein, as well as in the later; see Bubner, ‘Kant, Transcendental Arguments and the Problem of Deduction’, Review of Metaphysics, 28 (1975), pp.453-67. Habermas (and also Apel) employs a variation on transcendental argument which attempts to Set up certain normative conditions as a priori constraints on the possibility of discourse – see especially Habermas, Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, p.2. Such constraints serve exactly the function of background or horizontal concepts, insofar as they open up a space in which discourse, of a certain sort or of any sort, is possible. See also my ‘The Transcendental Circle’, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 75 (1997), pp.1-20.

¹⁰² See ‘Transcendental Arguments and Conceptual Schemes: A Reconsideration of Körner’s Uniqueness

Argument', Kant-Studien, 81(1990), pp.232-51, especially pp.248-51; also Malpas, 'Gadamer, Davidson and the Ground of Understanding.'

¹⁰³ 'Transcendental Arguments', p.255.

¹⁰⁴ Such a formulation is certainly more general than the original formulations of the verification – or verifiability principle. See, for instance, Moritz Schlick's account of the 'verifiability' principle: Stating the meaning of a sentence amounts to stating the rules according to which the sentence is to be used, and this is the same as stating the way in which it can be verified (or falsified)' ('Meaning and Verification', in Schlick, Philosophical Papers, 11 [1925-1936], ed. Henk L. Mulder and Barbara F. B. Van de Velde-Schuck [Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979], p.438).

¹⁰⁵ Significantly Mark Okrent, while noting similarities between the Heideggerian and Davidsonian positions, also treats both Davidson and Heidegger as implicitly adopting a form of verificationism (Heidegger's Pragmatism, pp.125-9 and 150). Okrent presents Heidegger as engaged in a transcendental project concerned to establish the horizon within which meaningful utterance is possible (ibid, pp.271ff). Okrent seems, however, simply to assume the correctness of the claim that transcendental arguments are verificationist (Okrent, ibid, p.6). Such a claim is surely contentious. Indeed, it may well depend on a mistaken understanding of the nature of transcendental argument. Whether or not transcendental arguments are verificationist, however, Okrent seems to imply that horizontality itself, at least in Heidegger, embodies a form of verificationism. My objection to Okrent could, in fact, be very briefly put in terms of his failure to understand the nature of horizontality itself as a notion which must go beyond any merely local specification. In Heideggerian terms the objection can be put, roughly, in terms of a reiteration of the so-called 'ontological difference' (the difference between being and beings)..

¹⁰⁶ Davidson is, of course, a student of Quine, and since Quine does seem to espouse a form of verificationism about meaning (see, for instance, 'Epistemology Naturalized', p.80), so it might be thought that Davidson's Quinean background must involve some verificationist commitment. This would, however, be to seriously underestimate the way in which Davidson transforms the original Quinean position.

Notes to Chapter Seven

¹ Although the question of Davidson's realist or anti-realist commitments arose in a particularly interesting fashion (at least so far as my own reading is concerned) in a more recent exchange in Inquiry. See Charles Spinoza and Hubert Dreyfus' 'Coping With Things-in-Themselves: A Practice-Based Phenomenological Argument for Realism', Inquiry 42 (1999), pp.49-78, and the associated replies (including my own 'The Fragility of Robust Realism: A Reply to Dreyfus and Spinoza', Inquiry, 42 [1999], pp.89-102).

² Devitt, 'Dummett's Anti-Realism', Journal of Philosophy, 80 (1983), p.76. Devitt points out that this definition is consistent with the account of Realism in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy: as 'the view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience. Realism is thus opposed to idealism, which holds that no such material objects or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them.' (R. J. Hirst, 'Realism', in Paul Edwards (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy [New York: Macmillan, 1967], p.77).

³ Devitt has been insistent on treating realism as essentially a metaphysical position that need not involve any particular commitments on matters concerning language, truth or knowledge. See Devitt, 'Rorty's Mirrorless World', in p.A. French, TE. Uehling and H. K. Wettstein (eds.), Midwest Studies in Philosophy 7: Realism and Antirealism (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp.157-78.

⁴ Reason, Truth and History, p.49.

⁵ In 'Rorty's Mirrorless World', pp.158-9, Devitt presents realism as having two components: an existence component according to which the realist is committed to 'the existence of such commonsense entities as stones, trees, and cats, and such scientific entities as electrons, muons, and curved space-time'; and an independence component according to which realists reject the claim that such entities are dependent for their existence on the mental.

⁶ Nagel, The View From Nowhere (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.91. Nagel refers to Fodor as defending the same thesis. See Fodor, The Modularity of Mind (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford Books (MIT Press), 1983), pp.120-6.

⁷ Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere, p.90. Alan H. Goldman argues that realism is indeed committed to the defence of some form of global skepticism. See Goldman, 'Fanciful Arguments for Realism', Mind, 93 (1984), pp.19-38 and also A. C. Genova, 'Fantastic Realisms and Global Skepticisms', Philosophical Quarterly, 38 (1 988), pp.205-13.

⁸Here I am omitting Nagel's distinction between skepticism about what we know and skepticism about the possible extent of what we can know. See The View from Nowhere, p.90. From the point of view of the discussion here, I have treated what are two forms of skepticism in Nagel as one.

⁹ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.309. See also 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.298.

¹⁰ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.309.

¹¹ Nagel, The View From Nowhere, p.93.

¹² Nagel, *ibid.*, p.90.

¹³ David Papineau, Reality and Representation (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp.2-3. Papineau claims that realism is not committed to any 'total skepticism' – skepticism that would include even skepticism about whether we have beliefs. Such skepticism Papineau views as incoherent (pp.11-12). Of course such total skepticism is not necessarily the same as the 'global skepticism' that I have referred to. Global skepticism can be taken as committing us to the view only that most of our beliefs could be false.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13. Papineau's mention of justification here may be taken to indicate that it is indeed skepticism (and not merely fallibilism) that is at issue.

¹⁵ As I have noted earlier (see §2.2.2), the exact way in which beliefs are identified by being related to the speaker's environment, depends on how far our interpretative project has advanced. The 'environment' (or the 'world') may be understood in a broader or narrower sense according to how broadly the horizons of interpretation have developed.

¹⁶ 'The Myth of the Subjective', Subjective, p.52.

¹⁷Consequently, we should not be misled into thinking that sharing the 'same' world implies that we must all have exactly the same beliefs about that world or that we must concur in our descriptions of it. The commonality of the world does not rule out differences in how we live in the world, in how we

experience the world, or in what we say about the world.

¹⁸ ‘On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, Inquiries, p.198.

¹⁹ See Davidson, ‘Epistemology and Truth’, Subjective, 185.

²⁰ See the discussion in ‘The Fragility of Robust Realism’, pp.00-00.

²¹ In ‘Epistemology and Truth’, p.185, Davidson comments that ‘I must make clear that I am neither accepting nor rejecting the objectivist-realist slogan that the real and the true are ‘independent of our beliefs’. The only evident positive sense we can make of this phrase that consorts with the intentions of those who prize it derives from the idea of correspondence, and this idea must be rejected’. Although my construal of the independence requirement may well not consort with ‘the intentions of those who prize it’, I would nonetheless claim that it provides a sense of independence that is both necessary and significant. For more on this issue see my ‘The Fragility of Robust Realism: A Reply to Dreyfus and Spinoza’, Inquiry, 42 (1999), pp.00-00.

²² ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, p.319.

²³ See also A. C. Genova ‘Fantastic Realisms and Global Skepticism’, pp.205-13.

²⁴ In ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, p.318 n. 8. The idea is also suggested by A. C. Genova, ‘Fantastic Realisms and Global Skepticism’.

²⁵ See Paul Horwich, ‘Davidson on deflationism’, in Żegleń, Donald Davidson. Truth, meaning and knowledge, pp.20-24.

²⁶ In ‘What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)’, and ‘What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)’.

²⁷ Ways of Meaning, p.33.

²⁸ Of course, on the face of it, it may seem that Platts’ account of the realism question according to which it centres on the issue of whether or not ‘the applicability of the truth-predicate ... is determined by extra-linguistic reality’ does not engage with Dummett ‘s account of the realism/anti-realism dispute. Yet in fact one can see that any thoroughgoing verificationist view of meaning – the sort of view that seems to be at the heart of Dummettian anti-realism – will likely be opposed to any account of meaning as a relation between sentences and extra-linguistic reality. To allow that meaning could be understood in terms of such a relation would be to allow what Dummett rejects. It would allow for the possibility of verification-transcendent truth conditions, since, if meaning is determined by a relation

between sentences and a reality divorced from language, then the possibility arises that perhaps reality is inaccessible to verification. Thus, if the Davidsonian account satisfies Platts' definition of realism, it appears that it ought also to count as a realist position on at least one version of the Dummettian view.

²⁹ See Stoutland, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, I', Critica, 14 (1982), pp.13-51, and 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, II', Critica, 14 (1982), pp.19-47. Stoutland would no longer endorse the account of Davidson contained in these two papers, but Stoutland's discussions are nevertheless useful, not only because of the detail with which they develop the argument at issue, but also in exemplifying certain more widespread tendencies in the reading of Davidson's work.

³⁰ Strawson, 'Truth', Logico-Linguistic-Papers (London: Methuen and Co., 1971), p.200.

³¹ Thus Frege claims that if the truth value of a sentence is its reference, then all true sentences have the same reference, namely the True, and all false sentences have the same reference, namely, the False – see Gottlob Frege, 'On Sense and Reference', Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, trans. Max Black (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), p.111. For Davidson's presentation of the 'slingshot argument,' see 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, p.42.

³² 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', Inquiries, p.194. Compare this with Strawson, 'Truth', p.195: 'The only plausible candidate for the position of what (in the world) makes the statement true is the fact it states; hut the fact it states is not something in the world. It is not an object.'

³³ 'Thoughts', in Frege, Logical Investigations, ed. P.Oeach (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp.3-4. Frege's argument is discussed and criticised by Michael Dummett, Frege's Philosophy of Language (London: Duckworth, 1973), p.443. I am grateful to Drew Khlentzos for his useful discussion of both Frege's argument and Dummett's reply in his unpublished PhD dissertation, Realism, Understanding and Truth (ANU, Canberra: 1987), pp.23-33. A line of argument similar to that advanced by Frege seems to be employed by F. H. Bradley against what he calls the 'copy-theory' of truth (Essays on Truth and Reality [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914], p.109 n. 1). Bradley writes 'To copy is to reproduce in some other existence more or less of the character of an object which is before your mind. Now, apart from knowledge and truth, there can be no original object before you to copy. And hence to

make truth consist in copying is obviously absurd. This question I take to have been settled, once and for all, by the post-Kantian criticism of the doctrine of the Thing-in-itself. That criticism I take to have proved that, outside of truth, there can be no criterion of truth' (Essays on Truth and Reality, p.345).

³⁴ Stoutland, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, I', p.14.

³⁵ See Dummett, 'Truth', Truth and Other Enigmas (London: Duckworth, 1978), pp.14-19 and 'Truth Postscript', *ibid.*, pp.23-4. See also Dummett, 'Realism', *ibid.*, p.146.

³⁶ See 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, pp.37-54 And compare this with his comments in 'Epistemology and Truth', Subjective, pp.182-5.

³⁷ 'Introduction', Inquiries, pp.xiv-xv.

³⁸ See Davidson, 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, pp.47-8.

³⁹ Strawson, 'Truth', p.190; quoted in 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, p.53.

⁴⁰ 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, pp.53-4.

⁴¹ 'True to the Facts', Inquiries, pp.53-4.

⁴² Such a notion is suggested by Davidson's own comments about the need to maintain the intuitions of both Schlick and Neurath; see Davidson, 'Empirical Content', (revise to pagination in Subjective), p.486.

⁴³ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.302-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.302 n. 36.

⁴⁵ 'Afterthoughts', Subjective, p.154; see also 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.302.

⁴⁶ 'Reality Without Reference', Inquiries, pp.223-4.

⁴⁷ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.300.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, p.309, see also .

⁴⁹ Stoutland, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, II', p.19.

⁵⁰ 'For an internalist... signs do not correspond to objects, independently of how those signs are employed and by whom. But a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users. Objects do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one

or other scheme of description. Since the objects and the signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what' (Putnam, Reason, Truth and History, p.52).

- ⁵¹ Stoutland, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, II', p.20n.3.
- ⁵² 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', (revise to Subjective pagination), p.309. Davidson reiterates his opposition to such anti-realism in 'The Structure and Content of Truth', pp.305-9.
- ⁵³ Stoutland, 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, I', p.21.
- ⁵⁴ Clearly Davidson does see the connection with human practices as important, though not in quite the way that one suspects Stoutland does. See 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.300. On Dummett see also, *ibid.*, pp.307-9.
- ⁵⁵ That Davidson does adopt a coherence theory of truth seems to be assumed, not only by Stoutland, but also by Ralph C. S. Walker. In The Coherence Theory of Truth (London: Routledge, 1989), especially pp.193-9, Walker writes that 'Davidson also argues for a pure version of the coherence theory of truth' (*ibid.*, p.193) without any suggestion that this might be a problematic claim. Davidson's views are treated by Walker as similar in many respects to Putnam's, and both are treated as relying on verificationist assumptions.
- ⁵⁶ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.308; see also p.319.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.307.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.307. This is a slogan Davidson now rejects, see 'Afterthoughts', Subjective, p.154.
- ⁵⁹ 'Realism and Anti-Realism in Davidson's Philosophy of Language, II', p.20.
- ⁶⁰ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.308.
- ⁶¹ Frege, 'Thoughts', p.4.
- ⁶² 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.309.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.282.
- ⁶⁴ 'White Mythology', in Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.217.
- ⁶⁵ 'On Truth and Falsity in their Ultra-Moral Sense', in Nietzsche, Complete Works, II, ed. Oscar Levy (London and Edinburgh: George Allen and Unwin, 1911), p.180.

⁶⁶ See, for instance. p.17: also pp.3-22. See also Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, pp.276, 311, 371-2 and 374-9.

⁶⁷ See especially the articles collected in Part II of Rorty's, Objectivism, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Papers, Vol 1, The assimilation of Davidson to the ranks of American pragmatism is not restricted to Rorty. See John P. Murphy, Pragmatism. From Peirce to Davidson (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990). See Davidson's comments on Rorty's reading of his position in 'Afterthoughts', Subjective, pp.154-7.

⁶⁸ See Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), especially pp.20, 110, 116 and 120.

⁶⁹ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.298. Davidson suggests that 'most contemporary proposals fall into two broad categories: those which humanize truth by making it basically epistemic, and those which promote some form of correspondence theory'. Accounts that treat truth as an epistemic concept include pragmatic theories of truth, coherence theories and most forms of anti-realism. Treating truth as an epistemic concept in this way is to be infected 'with the epistemological virus'.

⁷⁰ Certainly Derrida gives the impression in some of his writings that he advocates the complete abandonment of the notion of truth. See, for instance, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Foucault's insistence on the close relation between truth and power might suggest his espousal of some relativised notion of truth in which truth is a matter of social institutions and practices. See, for instance, Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 -1977, ed. Cohn Gordon (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf; 1980), p.133. I leave open the question whether such readings, both of which are very common, do not, in fact, oversimplify the thinking of Derrida and Foucault.

⁷¹ See particularly the Introduction to Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language, pp.2-3.

⁷² Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, pp.3-22.

⁷³ 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', pp.308-9.

⁷⁴ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.295. See also 'The Centrality of Truth' in Jaroslav Peregrin (ed.),

Truth and Its Nature (If Any) (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), pp.105-15 and 'The Folly of Trying to Define Truth', Dialogue and Universalism 6 (1996), pp.39-53.

⁷⁵ 'The Structure and Content of Truth', p.326.

⁷⁶ Of course, horizontality is a notion that is itself tied to the idea of intentionality, and I have, at times, talked about the intentional-horizonal character of the psychological in order to emphasize the way these two belong together. Yet if horizontality is bound up with intentionality, and if understanding truth in terms of horizontality can lead us, if mistakenly, back to a notion of truth as coherence, might it not also be possible to understand truth on the basis of intentionality, and so find ourselves returned to the idea of truth as correspondence? Certainly, insofar as intentionality can be seen as a relation between intender and intended, it allows for the possibility of separating intentional object from intending subject, and in that case might also allow intentionality to then be seen as itself consisting in a relation of confrontation or representation. Yet not only does intentionality not exhaust the intentional-horizonal structure at issue here, but that structure, and intentionality along with it, arises prior to any relation of confrontation or representation. Similarly, although it might be seen as the basis for correspondence, intentionality is not itself a relation of correspondence. The notion of intentionality does not license the claims of correspondence to provide a complete account of truth.

⁷⁷ See especially Being and Time, H227-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ I discuss a more general version of this problem in relation to the contrast between analysis and hermeneutics in my paper 'Analysis and Hermeneutics'.

⁸⁰ See Gadamer, 'Heidegger's Later Philosophy', in Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp.213-28, in which Gadamer explicitly discusses Heidegger's account of truth as unconcealment or 'unhiddenness'; see also Robert J. Dostal, 'The Experience of Truth for Gadamer and Heidegger: Taking Time and Sudden Lighting', in Wachterhauser (ed.), Hermeneutics and Truth, pp.47-67.

⁸¹ Mark Okrent makes some comparison between Heidegger, Quine and Davidson in Heidegger's Pragmatism, pp.293- 4. 19. Okrent's reading of Heidegger is intriguing, though one with which I

ultimately disagree. For an interesting discussion of Heidegger in relation to Kuhn, as well as Davidson and Rorty, see Joseph Rouse, 'Kuhn, Heidegger and Scientific Realism', Man and World, 14 (1981), pp.269-90. In this regard Rouse also briefly discusses Heidegger's notion of truth.

⁸² Being and Time, H214.

⁸³ Ibid, H62.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, p.222.

⁸⁵ I talk of 'things' to avoid any suggestion of the subject-object dichotomy that might be implied by the use of the alternative term 'object'. Nevertheless, keeping in mind Davidson's own attack on the idea of the subject as a private inner realm opposed to an external, public 'object', one might still be able to use the term 'object' without meaning to invoke the old dichotomy. Davidson himself does this and so, at times, have I. The term 'object' should not be taken as always implying a simple subject-object dichotomy. Such a contrast would certainly be inappropriate in the Heideggerian context as much as in the Davidsonian.

⁸⁶ Being and Time, H218-19.

⁸⁷ See Being and Time, §44, H212-30 and also 'On the Essence of Truth', pp.116-7.

⁸⁸ The main sources for Heidegger's account of truth are: Being and Time, especially H213-30; 'On The Essence of Truth', trans. John Sallis, in Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, pp.115-38; The Essence of Truth, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002); 'The Origin of the Work of Art', trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp.17-87; 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth', trans. John Barlow, in William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken (eds.), Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, II (New York: Random House, 1962), pp.251-70; 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', trans. Joan Stambaugh, in Martin Heidegger, Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, pp.388-9. Heidegger's thinking about truth undergoes a number of shifts, but perhaps the most important, for my purposes, is that which is indicated in the shift from the discussion in Being and Time in 1927 to 'On the Essence of Truth' in 1930. That shift is one in which truth is brought much more to the fore in Heidegger's thinking and is also understood, not as something centered on Dasein, that is, on the essence of human being, but rather as an event in which human being is itself caught up (see Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy [From Enowing],

trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.207ff.

- ⁸⁹ See Being and Time, H33. Heidegger also refers to truth as ‘disclosedness’ – Erschlossenheit. The accuracy of Heidegger’s translation of aletheia as unhiddenness has been disputed – see the summary of the matter in Reinar Schürmann, Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy, p.357, n. 33.
- ⁹⁰ For Heidegger, this is expressed in his treatment of aletheia as a privative term – as a-letheia/un-concealment – and so unconcealment is seen as a modification of concealment. See Being and Time, H222-3 and ‘On the Essence of Truth’, p.130.
- ⁹¹ Joseph J. Kockelmans, On the Truth of Being: Reflections on Heidegger’s Later Philosophy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.16. See also Mark Wrathall, ‘Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence’, International Journal of Philosophical Studies 7 (1999), pp.69-88.
- ⁹² ‘Afterthoughts’, Subjective, p.154
- ⁹³ Although, this is not to deny that further analysis of opening might be possible of the sort that Heidegger attempts, for instance, in Being and Time and elsewhere.
- ⁹⁴ Being and Time, H219-20.
- ⁹⁵ The connection between charity and meaning is the aspect of the Quinean and Davidsonian positions that is taken up by Mark Okrent in relation to Heidegger – see Okrent, Heidegger’s Pragmatism, pp.293-4, n. 19
- ⁹⁶ See Ernst Tugendhat, Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2nd edn., 1970) and also ‘Heidegger’s Idea of Truth’ in Wachterhauser (ed.), Hermeneutics and Truth, pp.83-97. There is a detailed discussion of Tugendhat’s criticisms in Daniel Dahlstrom, Heidegger’s Concept of Truth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially pp.392ff; see also Mark Wrathall, ‘Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence’.
- ⁹⁷ See Heidegger, ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’, in Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings pp.446-7 and also Heraclitus Seminar, 1966-1967, with Eugen Fink, trans. Charles H. Siebert (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), p.161. Whether Heidegger was correct in this abandonment is open to debate, although the considerations adduced above may be taken to provide some basis on which to claim that what Heidegger cannot be severed from the concept of

truth in the way that Heidegger's late comments suggest. Mark Wrathall claims that the Heideggerian abandonment of *aletheia* as a form of truth is based in a correct recognition of the need to distinguish between truth and the conditions of truth, see Wrathall, 'Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence', pp.70-3. See also Mark Okrent's discussion of this matter in Heidegger's Pragmatism, p.284. I am not convinced that this distinction must be deployed in a way that restricts truth merely to truth as correctness – in fact, I suspect that Heidegger's own move in this direction is more to do with the difficulties his identification of truth with *aletheia* encountered, than with any purely philosophical considerations.

⁹⁸ The difficulty is reflected in the extent to which metaphorical language comes to the fore both in my own and in Heidegger's account. The use of metaphor in philosophical thinking is much more important (as Derrida suggests in 'White Mythology') than philosophy itself has usually acknowledged. Yet philosophical thinking can itself be seen as arising out of the attempt to articulate certain particularly basic and powerful metaphors. This should not be seen as implying any denigration of philosophy, but rather recognising the proper place of metaphor in our thinking. Davidson has himself emphasized the nature of metaphor as a form of 'seeing as' (see 'What do Metaphors Mean', Inquiries, pp.245-64). In this respect metaphor is, at least in Heideggerian terms, itself thoroughly hermeneutical and also, in Heideggerian terms, essentially truthful. For Heidegger, the original event of truth is the concealing/unconcealing of things; it is a matter of things showing themselves. In Being and Time Heidegger thus presents his 'hermeneutical' method as 'truthful' in that the method is one that lets things reveal themselves through themselves (see H37-9). This is the real significance of Nietzsche's connecting of truth with metaphor. It is not that truth is metaphor, but rather that metaphor is essentially truthful in the sense in which the metaphorical opens things up, allowing things to show forth. In this respect Nietzsche's association of both truth and metaphor with illusion may be misleading. Truth and metaphor are tied together, but that tie does not license the claim that truth is therefore essentially a form of illusion.

⁹⁹ 'Epistemology and Truth', Subjective, p.185.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Dostal, 'The World Never Lost: The Hermeneutics of Trust', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 47 (1987), pp.413-34. This dispute, like that between realists and anti-realists, seems to

center on the problematic nature of truth. The way the issue arises between Gadamer and Derrida is, however, rather different, and is pursued at another level, from the dispute between realists such as Devitt and anti-realists like Dummett. Moreover Derrida's own position on the matter of truth is, I suggest, more subtle than is usually assumed.

¹⁰¹ Sean Sayers, Reality and Reason: Dialectic and the Theory of Knowledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p.113.

¹⁰² So Heidegger comments: 'Does the title for the task of thinking then read instead of Being and Time: Opening and Presence? But where does the opening come from and how is it given? What speaks in the "There is/It gives"?' ('The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', p.392). It is thus that I referred above (§7.4.2) to the utter mystery of unconcealment.

¹⁰³ For more on the character of this prior 'opening', see my 'Beginning in Wonder', in Nikolas Kompridis (ed.), Philosophical Romanticism, forthcoming, 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Though it should be noted that such 'naive realism' is very different from what is referred to as 'naive realism' by, for instance, Wilfrid Sellars, 'Realism and the New Way of Words', p.425.