The Primitive Thesis: Defending a Davidsonian Conception of Truth

BY

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Dissertation Abstract

In this dissertation I defend the claim, long held by Donald Davidson, that truth is a primitive concept that cannot be correctly or informatively defined in terms of more basic concepts. To this end I articulate the history of the primitive thesis in the 20th century, working through early Moore, Russell, and Frege, and provide improved interpretations of their reasons for advancing and (in the cases of Moore and Russell) eventually abandoning the primitive thesis. I show the importance of slingshot-style arguments in the work of Frege, Church, Davidson, and Gödel for resisting certain versions of the correspondence theory of truth. I argue that most slingshots fail to convincingly establish a collapsing conclusion, but that a Gödelian version of the slingshot is terminal to certain varieties of the correspondence theory of truth. I then provide a Davidsonian theory of truth and interpretation that is consistent with and makes use of the primitive thesis. Finally, I provide an account of predication, properties, and universals that I argue is both serviceable and consistent with Davidson's overall program.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I want to thank my my parents, Bob and Colleen, who are two of the most supportive and loving parents anyone could ask for. Bob impressed on me very early on that truth is objective, and that it is important to be right even if it makes you unpopular. He did this not by telling me, but by example. He remains the most moral man I've ever met. Colleen is a fountain of motivation: she throws herself into any task she takes on with incredible zeal. She showed me what it is really like to *work*. For an appreciation of the virtues of independence and dedication, and for much else, I owe them tremendously: I dedicate this dissertation to them, with love. My brother Brian was a wonderful companion to grow up with, and a great sounding board for my early ideas (most of which were incorrect). Being able to spend the past two years in the same city with Brian and his new fiancé Angela has been a delight.

Jack Bricke introduced me to the work of Donald Davidson, and I cannot thank him enough. His careful supervision had a huge impact on the shape of this project. In addition, he is simply a delightful person, whose calm patience and measured diction complement an extremely incisive mind. My debt to Professor Bricke is enormous.

I need to thank Dale Dorsey, Eileen Nutting, John Symons, and Cliff Pye, all of whom read this dissertation and provided excellent and probing questions. Eileen Nutting in particular took the time to read and comment on many of the chapters while they were in draft form, for which I am extremely grateful.

Two contemporary U.C. Berkeley philosophers, John Campbell and Barry Stroud, figure in chapters 4 and 5, and I owe both a debt of gratitude. It was when I was enrolled in John Campbell's course 'Theory of Meaning' as an undergraduate that the problems of philosophy

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Introduction

Donald Davidson argued that truth is the central semantic concept, and so is immune to conceptual analysis: he argued that truth is a *primitive* concept. In this dissertation I aim to articulate and defend a Davidsonian conception of truth. Of course, the thesis that truth is primitive isn't exclusive to Davidson. The first two chapters concern the history of the primitive thesis. In the third chapter, I attempt to block any attempt to informatively reduce truth to correspondence. The fourth and fifth chapters are my attempt show the positive work the primitive concept of truth is capable of performing in the diverse domains of interpretation, predication, properties, abstract objects, and common names.

In Chapter 1, I address the history of the primitive thesis in the early work of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. During the years from 1898-1912, both Moore and Russell maintained that truth was in some sense primitive, though both ended up abandoning their respective versions of the primitive thesis. This chapter helps reinforce the idea that what one says about truth (be it the concept of truth or the property of truth) places constraints on plausible conceptions of truth-bearers and truth-makers.

In Chapter 2, I examine the primitive thesis as it is found in the work of Frege. Frege maintained a version of the primitive thesis that he never abandoned. I pay special attention to Frege's theory of predication, in particular the claim that predicates are functions which map objects onto truth-values. The discussion of Frege's theory of predication sets the stage for the discussion of Davidson's theory of predication that I undertake in the final chapter. In Chapter 2 I also consider two Fregean arguments to bolster Frege's claim that truth is indefinable. Frege sowed the seeds of a family of arguments that came to be called Slingshot arguments. I construct

a slingshot-style argument from Fregean premises and argue that the argument doesn't succeed. I note that it isn't clear, however, that the *argument* I provide is in the Frege proper. The focus of the chapter is twofold. I want my discussion of Frege's theory of predication to foreshadow the Davidsonian account of predication that I provide in Chapter 5, and I want the discussion of the Fregean Proto-Slingshot to pave the way for Chapter 3, which is devoted to slingshot arguments and the consequences that can be derived from them.

Chapter 3 concerns slingshot arguments and, in particular, the problems that such arguments pose for certain conceptions of the correspondence theories of truth. I articulate some commonly held versions of the correspondence theory of truth. If certain versions of the correspondence theory of truth are correct, then truth can be defined informatively as correspondence to facts; facts would be truth makers, and we could explain truth in terms of truth-bearers, correspondence, and truth-makers. I explain how slingshot arguments work generally as collapsing arguments (regardless of their targets). I work through the slingshots of Church, Davidson, and Gödel. My claim is that the slingshots of Church and Davidson involve dubitable premises, but that Gödel's slingshot is terminal to the versions of the correspondence theories that I mentioned earlier in the chapter. My claim is that it is impossible to informatively define truth in terms of correspondence to facts.

In Chapter 4 I turn to a positive role for the concept of truth in a theory of meaning and interpretation generally. I want to make clear that the Davidsonian approach, far from dismissing the concept of truth, holds that the concept is central to our understanding each other and, ultimately, ourselves. In this chapter I discuss the role of the concept of truth in a Davidsonian theory of meaning and interpretation. It is here that I introduce Davidson's idea of triangulation,

and his claim that the triangle of two interpreters and a shared objective world is the source of the concept of truth. In the chapter I discuss what I take to be is a misunderstanding of Davidson's theory of interpretation by John Campbell. I claim that a discussion of the misunderstanding helps explain when we ought to attribute thought to an object we are trying to interpret.

I end Chapter 4 discussing predication in a basic interpretive scenario, and in Chapter 5 I turn to Davidson's discussion of the problem of predication generally: what is sometimes called the problem of the unity of the proposition. My aim is to elucidate Davidson's strategy of explaining predication in terms of truth. I then employ a similar strategy in giving what I think is a Davidsonian conception of properties, universals, and abstract objects. I argue that Davidson's version of externalism with regard to semantic content has certain anti-skeptical conclusions, a point with which we find some agreement (though even more disagreement) in the work of Barry Stroud. Finally, I give an account of what I call common names in terms of predication, and in doing so connect the Davidsonian perspective with the views of Zenon Pylyshyn.

Chapter 1

History of The Primitive Thesis: Early Russell and Moore

<u>1.1 Overview</u>

The thesis that truth is, in some sense, primitive, can be traced through 20th century analytic philosophy, beginning with the early thought of Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. Though both philosophers came to disavow the primitive thesis, examining the reasons for their eventual disavowal will be useful. This chapter begins with Moore, and moves back and forth between Russell and Moore to reflect the interplay that I claim their work had on each other. As an advocate of a version of primitivism, I claim that it is useful to work slowly through versions of the primitive thesis which have been deemed unworkable before articulating a version of the primitive thesis that I intend to defend.

<u>1.2 Introduction to Moore's Early Primitivism</u>

In 1899 Moore was in the process of breaking from F.H. Bradley's idealism, and published an influential essay *The Nature of Judgement*.[1] Situating Moore's 1899 essay helps explain the complicated account of judgement that Moore leaves us with. Though Moore himself (in his later 1911 lectures) diagnoses *problems* with the 1899 theory, it is Russell who supplies an account of the *motivation* for the theory, in particular as a realist rejection of the idealism of Hegel and Bradley, an idealism Russell himself briefly maintained. Since I consider

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[1] While the paper is ostensibly an attack on Bradley, the paper is littered with statements like "All that exists is thus composed of concepts necessarily related to one another in specific manners, and likewise to the concept of existence" (Moore, 1899, p. 181) and "It seems necessary, then, to regard the world as formed of concepts. These are the only objects of knowledge" (p. 182). While these claims might seem (on their face) to support a kind of idealism, Moore intended them to support a radical kind of realism.

this break to be the labor pains of the birth of Anglophone analytic philosophy, I think examining

the motivation behind the break is fruitful. Russell, admitting that he himself went through an

idealist period, claims "so, for a short time, did G. E. Moore. But he found the Hegelian

philosophy inapplicable to chairs and tables, and I found it inapplicable to mathematics; so with

his help I climbed out of it, and back to common sense tempered by mathematical logic."[2] Later,

Russell elaborates:

> I came to disbelieve Bradley's arguments against relations, and to distrust the
> logical bases of monism. I disliked the subjectivity of the 'Transcendental
> Aesthetic'. But these motives would have operated more slowly than they did, but
> for the influence of G. E. Moore. He also had had a Hegelian period, but it was
> briefer than mine. He took the lead in rebellion, and I followed, with a sense of
> emancipation. Bradley argued that everything common sense believes in is mere
> appearance; we reverted to the opposite extreme, and thought that everything is
> real that common sense, uninfluenced by philosophy or theology, supposes real.
> With my mental development and a sense of escaping from prison, we allowed
> ourselves to think that grass is green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one
> was aware of them, and also that there is a pluralistic timeless world of Platonic
> ideas.[3]

Bradley's metaphysics was monist and idealist. He argued that reality is best understood not as

independent from our experience of it, nor as consisting of entities which exist independently of

each other. Moore and Russell, in rebellion, wanted to bring philosophy back into accord with

common sense, maintaining that ordinary objects like tables and chairs exist, and exist in an

ordinary manner (that is, not merely as our perceptions of them, etc). It was pursuing this goal

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[2] Russell, 2009, p 7.

[3] Russell, 2009, pp 15-16.

that Moore and Russell developed (and then moved away from) a theory of truth in which truth is in some sense primitive.[4]

Moore himself provides a succinct summary of his view that truth is in some sense primitive, though we need to do some work to determine the relevant sense:

> It is a theory which I formerly held, and which certainly has the advantage that it is very simple... 'Truth' therefore, would, on this view, be a simple unanalyzable property which is possessed by some propositions and not by others.[5]

To fully articulate the view we can turn to Moore's earlier 1899 work *The Nature of Judgment*, where Moore's primitivism is originally articulated (let us call this view M1). It is impossible to understand Moore's account of truth without first examining his account of truth bearers, which are propositions.

Propositions are, for the Moore of 1899, composed of concepts. Here is Moore discussing propositions and their conceptual composition:

> A proposition is composed not of words, nor yet of thoughts, but of concepts. Concepts are possible objects of thought… they may come into relation with a thinker; and in order that they *may* do anything, they must already *be* something. It is indifferent to their nature whether anybody thinks them or not. They are incapable of change; and the relation into which they enter with the knowing subject implies no action or reaction… It is of such entities that a proposition is composed. In it certain concepts stand in specific relations with one another.[6]

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[4] It is often unclear whether they are talking about the concept TRUTH or the property *truth*. Throughout this and later chapters, I'll use TRUTH to refer to truth considered as a concept, *truth* to refer to truth considered as a property.

[5] Moore, 1956, p 284. This summary was given by Moore in 1911, after he had already abandoned the theory.

[6] Moore, 1899, p 179.

Concepts here appear to be an odd sort of entity; it is unclear *how* they would come into relation either with thinkers or with each other. According to this view, propositions would be structured abstract entities, as later Moore goes on to claim that propositions are constituted by "any number of concepts, together with a specific relation between them."[7] It is only propositions, and not concepts taken singularly, which are truth bearers (singular concepts are, for Moore, too simple to be truth bearers). Moore entertains a theory about the nature of truth such that a proposition is true if and only if it "consists of a combination of concepts that is actually to be found among existents" only to reject the theory for two reasons. First, such a theory would likely result in individual *concepts* being among the truth bearers (red would be a true concept, as there actually are red existents).[8] Secondly, and more problematically, Moore claims that mathematical truths intuitively *don't* depend on existents, arguing that 2+2=4 would be true even if no two things existed, and further arguing that it stretches our notion of existence beyond intelligibility to argue that 2 is an existent.[9]

Moore claims that concepts have a kind of primacy of existence over existents, such that "the opposition of concepts to existents disappears, since an existent is seen to be nothing but a concept or complex of concepts standing in a unique relation to the concept of existence."[10] That is, what it is for a thing like a chair to exist, to be an *existent*, is just for the particular concept

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[7] Moore, 1899, p. 180.

[8] Asay, 2013, seems to contend that the primary reason Moore abandons the view that truth depends on existents is that concepts themselves would thereby be eligible truth bearers, and that the resolution of the problem about truths without a dependence on existents is an afterthought, while I contend that the opposite is the case.

[9] Moore, 1899, p 180. As will be made clear shortly, Moore here has an interesting (and counter-intuitive) view on what it is to *be* an existent. Two is a concept, as is red, and existents can be two or red without talking of two or red as existents.

[10] Moore, 1899, pp 182-183.

CHAIR to stand in a unique relation to the concept EXISTENCE: This seemingly *equates*

existents with true existential propositions, and so enables Moore to claim that "truth cannot be

defined by a reference to existence; but existence only by a reference to truth," and that

"existence is logically subordinate to truth."[11] According to Moore:

> A proposition is constituted by any number of concepts, together with a specific
> relation between them; and according to the nature of this relation the proposition
> may be either true or false. What kind of relation makes a proposition true, what
> false, *cannot be further defined*, but must be immediately recognized.[12]

It is here that I believe we find Moore's primitivism. Some propositions are true, and some are

false, and there is a specific, undefinable relation of concepts with which a proposition is

constituted that accounts for their truth or falsity, a relation which is "immediatley known, like

red or two."[13] This relation which unites the concepts into a proposition, is immediately known

and undefinable, and is the property of truth or of falsity.[14]

While M1 might seem ontologically confused, it is important to reflect that Moore is only

beginning to shed his idealism in this paper. Russell noted that in their rebellion he and Moore

wanted to do justice to our commonsense beliefs that chairs and tables existed; in Moore's 1899

paper we have an account in which chairs do exist; what it is for a chair to exist is just for

CHAIR to stand in a true relation to EXISTENCE. Thus the strategy Moore employs is to

ground the metaphysical status of existents on possible relationships between concepts, where

concepts are non-mental. We may say that Moore has *reified meanings* in the struggle to account

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[11] Moore, 1899, p 180.

[12] Moore, 1899, p 180 *emphasis added.*

[13] Moore, 1899, p 181.

[14] Interestingly, Moore here seems to argue that truth values are the key to the problem of the unity of the proposition, a position which will be key to our understanding of Davidson's conception of truth and predication.

for our common sense intuitions. Moore here seems committed to an odd kind of ontological pluralism: concepts in a sense certainly *are*, but they don't appear to belong to the world of chairs or other *existents*. Rather, the manner in which concepts are related *accounts* for the world of existents. This is the manner in which existence is logically subordinate to truth. In order to find out if any particular thing X exists, we need to see whether X is truthfully related to EXISTENCE. Thus, questions about *what exists* dissolve into questions about truth. Questions about whether a given proposition is true cannot then be answered by appealing to what exists, but rather depend upon whether the proposition has the immediately recognizable and unanalyzable property *truth*. Moore seems to have worked his position out more clearly by 1902, when he composed an encyclopedia entry for truth and falsity:

> It seems plain that a truth differs in no respect from the reality to which it was supposed merely to correspond: e.g., the truth that I exist differs in no respect from the corresponding reality – my existence. So far, indeed, from truth being defined by reference to reality, reality can only be defined by reference to truth: for truth denotes exactly that property of the complex formed by two entities and their relation, in virtue of which, if the entity predicated be existence, we call the complex real – the property, namely, expressed by saying that the relation in question does truly or really hold between the entities.[15]

Truths, according to this view, are no different from the reality with which a correspondence theorist would maintain truths correspond. Again, *what it is* for X to exist is for there to be a true existential proposition involving X. So, for Moore at this stage there is no proposition/fact or truth/fact dichotomy; facts are mentioned in 1899 and 1902 only in the innocuous sense of

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[15] Moore, 1902. I think we can confidently count both the 1902 and 1899 papers as articulations of M1, with the 1902 as a more mature version of M1.

truths.[16] Interestingly, the above might provide motivation for an identity theory of truth,

although as Asay notes, this isn't quite right.[17] For Moore, TRUTH is the primitive concept, and

as is clear above reality is defined in terms of TRUTH, not the other way around. Thus the

identity theory that Moore seems to espouse here doesn't tell us anything about TRUTH but

rather about reality. TRUTH, Moore thinks, resists analysis.

    And Moore hasn't yet elaborated *what* it is for a property (or a concept) to be

unanalyzable, or immediately recognizable. For such an elaboration, we need to turn to his

Principia Ethica, in particular his discussion of the concept good. My suggestion is that if we

replace 'good' with 'truth' in the following passages, we obtain an accurate picture of Moore's

claim that truth is indefinable, unanalyzable, and immediately recognizable:

> Good, then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing,
> when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition, in the most
> important sense of that word. The most important sense of 'definition' is that in
> which a definition states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain
> whole; and in this sense 'good' has no definition because it is simple and has no
> parts.

and finally:

> My point is that 'good' is a simple notion, just as 'yellow' is a simple notion; that,
> just as you cannot, by any manner or means explain to any one who does not
> already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. Definitions
> of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe the real nature of the
> object or notion denoted by the word, and which do not merely tell us what the
> word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is

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[16] The problem of distinguishing between truths and facts, seemingly hinted at by Moore here, crops up in Frege, Wittgenstein, Russell, and, I'll argue, Davidson.

[17] Asay, 2013, p 57.

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something complex... But yellow and good, we say, are not complex: they are notions of the simple kind, out of which definitions are *composed* and with which the power of further defining *ceases.*[18]

I submit that since Moore uses color concepts in both *Principia Ethica* and *The Nature of Judgment* to illustrate unanalyzable primitivity (yellow and red, respectively), there is reason to believe he had the same quality in mind in both cases: Moore holds truth, along with yellow and good as primitive, and for the same reasons. Truth is therefore a simple kind of notion, one out of which definitions can be composed, but not itself constitutively definable.

1.3 Russell Abandons Primitivism

By 1911 Moore had abandoned his commitment to M1. What happened? I think the importance of Russell's philosophical output during that decade to Moore's thought cannot be underestimated. Russell's papers *On The Nature of Truth* in 1906 and *On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood* in 1909 moved from a Moorean primitivist conception of *truth* to a pure correspondence theory. In the 1906 paper Russell advances two views of truth, and contends that he can't decide which view he finds more plausible: the views in question are a variant of Moore's primitivism and a version of the correspondence theory. By 1909 Russell has settled firmly in the correspondence camp, and he's convinced Moore to abandon M1 as well.

In the 1906 paper false beliefs pose a particularly vexing problem for Russell, who (like Moore) wants our beliefs to have objects. Maintaining this is easier with regard to truth than with regard to falsity; for when we truly believe that the sun is shining, we seem to have an

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[18] Moore, 1993, pp 7-8 italics added.

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intuitive answer to the question of what we believe, for *what* we believe, is what *is the case*.

Hence, after claiming that all our beliefs must have objects, Russell laments:

> But this simple view is rather difficult to defend from objections of various kinds,
> tending to show that there are not only mistaken beliefs, but also non-facts, which
> are the objectively false objects of mistaken beliefs. The main reason for this
> view is the difficulty of answering the question: "what do we believe when our
> belief is mistaken?"[19]

Russell sketches his two theories of truth as candidates to help answer that question. Here is

Russell's version of Moorean Primitivism:

> If we accept the view that there are objective falsehoods, we shall oppose them to
> facts, and make *truth* the quality of facts, *falsehood* the quality of their opposites,
> which we may call fictions. Then facts and fictions together may be called
> *propositions*. A belief always has a proposition for its object, and is knowledge
> when its object is true, error when its object is false. Truth and falsehood, in this
> view, are ultimate, and no account can be given of what makes a proposition true
> or false.[20]

This looks like a form of metaphysical primitivity (let us call this view R1): some propositions

have a property of truth, others falsity. In both cases we err in trying to account for why

propositions have the truth values that they have, as no account can be given. In contrast, we

might think that there are no such things as 'objective falsehoods,' and that the facts are all that is

the case. In this case (let us call this view R2) we might say that it is our beliefs themselves

which are true or false, and not the objects of our beliefs. Our true beliefs would be those that

succeeded in corresponding to facts. Russell notes that this is a form of the correspondence

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[19] Russell, 1906, p 45.

[20] Russell, 1906, p 48.

theory, but that it has the unpleasant consequence that "error is the belief in nothing. For, when

we believe truly, our belief is to have an object which is a fact, but when we believe falsely, it

can have no object, unless there are objective non-facts"[21] and that "when [facts and our beliefs]

correspond, the beliefs are true, and are beliefs in facts; when they do not, the beliefs are

erroneous, and are beliefs in nothing."[22] The paper concludes with Russell torn between the

primitive theory (R1) and the correspondence theory (R2), espousing neither but prophetically

leaning towards correspondence, as he considers the idea of 'objective falsehoods' abhorrent. By

1909 he will have abandoned the primitive thesis, and by 1912 when Russell published *The*

Problems of Philosophy, the primitive thesis will be a distant memory, a theory not worthy of

consideration in print.

　　Russell's 1909 paper (which can be seen as a rough draft for the 1912 work) can be seen

primarily as Russell jettisoning the idea that beliefs or judgments have singular objects:

> If every judgment, whether true or false, consists in a certain relation, called
> "judging" or "believing", to a single object, which is what we judge or believe,
> then the distinction of true and false as applied to judgments is derivative from the
> distinction of true and false as applied to the objects of judgments. Assuming that
> there are such objects, let us, following Meinong, give them the name
> "Objectives".[23]

This is just Russell's setting up a reductio: instead of the objective falsehoods mentioned above

that Russell found problematic, it is false objectives that cause the trouble. The difference is

negligible at best, so it is interesting that a position (R1) Russell thought of as defensible but

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[21] Russell, 1906, pp 45-46.

[22] Russell, 1906, p 49.

[23] Russell, 1909, (in Russell 1994) p 151.

problematic in 1904, has by 1909 been deemed intolerable. The change is more drastic than that.

Recall that true objectives (or, objective truths) previously posed no problem for Russell; what

seemed objectionable was the baggage they brought along with them in the form of false

objectives. Curiously, in 1909 Russell seems to doubt whether it makes sense to say of any

judgment, whether true *or* false, that it corresponds to a singular object. Discussing this, and

noting that Charles I did indeed die on the scaffold, Russell claims that "it is difficult to believe

that there are such objects as 'that Charles I died in his bed' or even 'that Charles I died on the

scaffold.... Thus if we can avoid regarding "that so-and-so" as an independent entity, we shall

escape a paradox. This argument is not decisive, but it must be allowed a certain weight.'"[24].

Russell here registers distrust of propositions *period*, whether true or false; for Russell surely

would not deny that there was an event <Charles' death on the scaffold>. Recalling that in 1904

Russell distrusted objective falsehoods, it now seems like Russell objects to the reification of any

sentential meaning, if those meanings are intended to be singular entities, entities over and above

the entities which correspond to individual terms in a sentence.[25]

    And yet in the 1909 paper Russell vigorously defends his correspondence conception of

truth. The correspondence is best illustrated by highlighting what exactly 1909 Russell thinks a

judgment is:

> The theory of judgment which I am advocating is, that judgment is not a dual
> relation of the mind to a single Objective, but a multiple relation of the mind to
> the various other terms with which the judgment is concerned. Thus if I judge that

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[24] Russell 1909, p 151.

[25] Note that Russell doesn't have to deny that the object of "Charles" is Charles and the object of "scaffold" is scaffold (since both Charles and scaffolds exist(ed)) to deny that the object of "Charles died on the scaffold" is a singular entity: *that Charles died on the scaffold*. Also, though this does skirt the problem of falsity, it doesn't skirt the problem of sentences containing fictional names ("Godzilla", "Hamlet", etc).

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> A loves B, that is not a relation of me to "A's love for B", but a relation between me and A and love and B. If it were a relation of me to "A's love for B", it would be impossible unless there were such a thing as "A's love for B", i.e. unless A loved B, i.e. unless the judgment were true; but in fact false judgments are possible.[26]

So for 1909 Russell judgments are relations between minds and what he calls terms. It is wildly ambiguous what Russell means by 'terms'. Indeed in the passage just quoted, my judging A to love B involves a (structured) relation between myself, A, B, and love. This suggests that 'term' be read as objects (whether physical or abstract), where we would normally think of terms as linguistic and objects as non-linguistic. Notice that Russell *doesn't* say that the judgment involves a relation between my idea of A, my idea of B, and my idea of love, but rather a relation between myself and those three things. When are such judgements true? Russell later continues:

> We may now attempt an exact account of the "correspondence" which constitutes truth. Let us take the judgment "A loves B". This consists of a relation of the person judging to A and love and B, i.e. to the two terms A and B and the relation "love".… The "corresponding" complex object which is required to make our judgment true consists of A related to B by the relation which was before us in our judgment.… Thus the judgment that two terms have a certain relation R is a relation of the mind to the two terms and the relation R with the appropriate sense: the "corresponding" complex consists of the two terms related by the relation R.… The judgment is true when there is such a complex, and false when there is not. The same account, *mutatis mutandis*, will apply to any other judgment. *This gives the definition of truth and falsehood*.[27]

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[26] Russell, 1909, p 155.

[27] Russell, 1909, p 157. *Emphasis added*. I have omitted part of the account that accounts for the structure of the corresponding complex. Russell recognized he needed an account that distinguishes between "A loves B" and "B loves A".

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The above (which I'll refer to as R3) is, I think, Russell's first *comprehensive* endorsement of

correspondence as a definition of the nature of truth, and it isn't without problems. First, its not

clear how Russell's *mutatis mutandis* is going to be able to be fleshed out in order to do the work

he requires of it for *all* other judgments.[28] Secondly, it remains unclear *what* we judge when we

judge Godzilla to be non-self-identical. A third problem with R3 is whether we can make sense

of correspondence *at all* as attempted here. For if judgments are composed of terms in the sense

where terms just are objects, it is unclear that anything like 'correspondence' obtains, since

objects don't intuitively correspond to themselves, they simply *are* themselves. It appears

difficult to differentiate between the 'corresponding complex' of terms which plays the role of

truth-maker and the complex of terms which are constituents in the judgement *itself*. Thus, we

run the risk of ending up with a kind of identity theory of truth where truths are indistinguishable

from facts. Russell is aware that this will not do: It is this third problem which I want to

examine, but I think the discussion works best in light of Russell's 1912 *The Problems of*

Philosophy, where he articulates a more mature version of the correspondence theory mentioned

above with a rather elegant attempt at a solution to this third problem.

1.4 Moore Rejects M1

    Moore's lectures in 1910 and 1911 reflect Russell's progress. It is in these lectures that

Moore abandons M1, doing so for reasons which echo Russell's disdain for 'false objectives'.

Remember that M1 depended on truth being a primitive, immediately recognizable property of

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[28] Many contemporary debates in current truth-maker theory deal with this very problem for things like negative
existential statements, and it is unclear what the status of ethical claims would be under this conception, issues
which we'll discuss in subsequent chapters.

propositions, where propositions are composed of concepts. Early Moore (M1) might say the following. "Bears exist" expresses a proposition (and so the proposition expressed *is*) composed of BEARS and EXISTENCE , a proposition which has the primitive and immediately recognizable property *truth*. The fact that bears exist is a result of the truth of the proposition. "Unicorns exist" expresses a proposition (and so the proposition expressed *is*), but this proposition is composed of UNICORNS and EXISTENCE, and has the property *falsehood*. According to this view there are objective falsehoods: falsehoods are propositions that in Moore's terminology *are,* in the sense that those propositions 'have being,' but they refer to facts which do not 'have being.' Furthermore, those propositions refer to facts: falsehoods express propositions that refer to facts which have no being.[29] By 1911 Moore recites this position not to endorse it, but in order to raise two objections to the primitive theory.

Noting that he doesn't seem to have any *decisive* arguments against the theory, and that he's unclear how to state his objections clearly, Moore spends pages trying to articulate just why he no longer holds the primitive thesis. The first objection concerns the truth-making relation. Moore no longer finds it plausible to maintain that the relation between facts and propositions is such that facts depend for their existence on the truth-values of propositions:

> It is this: namely, that the fact to which a true belief refers - the fact, which is, only if the belief be true, and simply has no being at all, if it be false - does not, if you think of it, seem to consist merely in the possession of some simple property by a proposition - that is to say, something which has being equally whether the belief be true or false . For instance, the fact that lions really do exist does not seem to consist in the possession of some simple property by a proposition which

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[29] Moore, 1956, p 286.

we believe, when we believe that they exist, even if we grant that there is such a thing as this proposition.[30]

I think the intuition Moore is getting at here is that M1 gets things explanatorily backwards. Intuitively, the existence of lions doesn't depend on the truth of the proposition expressed by "lions exist," rather the existence of actual lions explains why the proposition expressed by "lions exist" is true; the truth of the proposition depends on actual lions, and not the other way around.[31] I share the intuition that *if* there is to be a truth making relation that obtains between facts and propositions, *then* it ought to exhibit the kind of directionality Moore's objection seems to indicate, from fact to proposition. Whether or not we *need* to posit a truth-making relation I'll discuss further in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

The second objection Moore raises is, he argues, deadly not only to M1, but to his analysis of belief in general. It is a doubt that there are such things as propositions *at all:*

> But this is the sort of objection I feel. It is that, if you consider what happens when a man entertains a false belief, it doesn't seem as if his belief consisted merely in his having a relation to some object which certainly is. It seems rather as if the thing which he was believing, the *object* of his belief, were just *the* fact which certainly is *not* - which certainly is not, because his belief is false. This, of course, creates a difficulty, because if the object certainly is *not* - if there is no such thing, it is impossible for him or for anything else to have any kind of relation to it.[32]

This objection would be terminal to the theory of belief Moore has been entertaining, where the relation is a one-to-one relation between the believer and the belief, where the belief is a

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[30] Moore, 1956, p. 286.

[31] Asay makes a similar remark (he uses 'penguins') 2013, pp 62-63.

[32] Moore, 1956, pp 286-287.

proposition; it is also terminal for Moore's earlier theory that propositions exist and have the immediately recognizable and primitive property of truth or falsity. If the intuition driving Moore's second objection is sound, it's unclear how anyone can entertain a false belief. A page later Moore gives up on the existence of propositions entirely, saying "there simply are no such things as *propositions*" but he thinks we can (and must) go on speaking about them *as if* they existed nonetheless.[33]

Having abandoned propositions, Moore needs to give us an account of belief and the relation between beliefs, facts, and truth. Moore elaborates (let us call this view M2):

> To say that a belief is true is to say that the *fact to which it refers is* or has being; while to say that a belief is false is to say that the fact to which it refers is not - that there is no such fact… Every belief has the property of *referring* to some particular fact, every different belief to a different fact; and *the* property which a belief has, when it is true - *the* property which we name when we call it true, is the property which can be expressed by saying that the fact to which it refers *is*.
>
> This is precisely what I propose to submit as the fundamental definition of truth.[34]

This definition of truth (and the ontological baggage it brings along), while less intuitively problematic than M1, might be thought unpalatable for a few reasons. First, M2 needs to account for falsity: he is committed to the thought that every belief refers to a fact, and that only some facts 'have being.' Thus a belief can refer to something that *is not*, which Moore noted earlier is problematic, and might be deemed problematic for reasons very similar to those that prompted Russell's rejection of 'false objectives.' I confess that I too think M2 is problematic in its account of false beliefs, but I think M2 is problematic concerning true beliefs as well.

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[33] Moore, 1956, p 289.

[34] Moore, 1956, p. 291.

The problem with M2 and its account of truth, belief and fact with respect to true beliefs is in the *granularity* of Moore's facts, which Moore brings up while trying to shed light on what the relation of referring must be for his above definition of truth to be accurate:

> Take any belief you like; it is, I think, quite plain that there is just one fact, and only one, which would have being - would be in the Universe, if the belief were true; and which would have no being - would simply not be if the belief were false. And as soon as we know what the belief is, we know just as well and as certainly what the fact is which in this sense corresponds with it.[35]

According to this theory, facts appear *as finely grained* as the true beliefs that refer to them (each and every belief has its very own fact). The reasoning is as follows: according to M2, to understand a belief is just to understand what corresponding fact would 'have being' were the belief true. Since every belief corresponds to one and only one fact, it is rational to think that there must be a one-to-one correspondence between true beliefs and facts.[36]

Moore also needs an account of what the referring/corresponding (Moore freely substitutes the two terms) relation in M2 *is*, and here he seems to leave us wanting:

> Obviously, this expression "referring to" stands for some relation which each true belief has to one fact and to one only; and which each false belief has to no fact at all; and the difficulty was to define this relation. Well, I admit I can't define it, in the sense of analyzing it completely…[but] it doesn't follow that we may not know perfectly well what the relation is; we may be perfectly acquainted with it; it may be perfectly familiar to us; and we may know both that there is such a relation and that this relation is essential to the definition of truth.[37]

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[35] Moore, 1956, p. 292.

[36] I indicate why I think this is problematic in Chapter 3: this is an example of what I there call the problem of *fact fission*.

[37] Moore, 1956, pp 291-292.

Ignoring the claim that false beliefs don't refer (Moore previously has said that they do refer to facts which lack 'being'), I think it is interesting that according to M2 the referring relation itself cannot be analyzed; we simply know that true beliefs refer to facts, and M2 permits no further analysis.

A further problem for M2 arises when Moore tries to give an account of what exactly a fact is: "I am going, then, to use the name "facts" simply and solely as a name for the kind of constituents of the universe which correspond to true beliefs."[38] One might wonder how informative Moore's M2 definition of truth is, considering that he considers reference/ correspondence itself undefinable, and he defines 'fact' in terms of *truth*. Even more problematically, Moore thinks that 'a fact' and 'a truth' are interchangeable, so that it is perfectly reasonable to think that true beliefs correspond/refer to particular truths: "It is, I think, important to notice that 'a truth' is merely another name for a fact…"[39] and finally, noting that truths/facts are different from true acts of belief, Moore states:

> It may be asked: What, after all, is the property which all truths have in common, and which is not shared by anything which is not a truth? How are we to distinguish the sort of thing you mean by a "truth," from all the sorts of things which are not truths? And in answer to this question, I confess I don't know how to describe the property which belongs to all truths and only to truths: it seems to me to be a property which can be pointed out and seen, but if it can be analyzed, I don't see how to analyze it. The case seems to me to be the same, as if you were asked what a "a colour" is. All of us, who are not blind, know perfectly well what

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[38] Moore, 1956, p. 324

[39] Moore, 1956, p. 324

a color is, and, with regard to anything whatever which may come before our minds, we can tell, with perfect ease, whether it is a color or not.[40]

It might seem that Moore hasn't really abandoned primitivism about either *truth* or TRUTH, for what he has told us is that there are two properties of truth; *truth(b)* is a property of beliefs, a property of all and only those beliefs which refer to truths, and the property that all truths (or, facts) have in common (which we may call *truth(f)*) is unanalyzable and, one might think, primitive. The use of the primitivity of color terms parallels what Moore said in M1 and in *Principia Ethica*. In short, I'm not convinced that reading M2 as departing from M1 in virtue of Moore abandoning primitivism is the correct interpretation; arguably Moore has simply changed his mind about which property of truth is in fact primitive.[41] It seems then that the difference between M1 and M2 isn't that Moore abandons the primitive thesis. Rather he abandon's M1's odd contention that questions about existence are actually questions about the truth of existential propositions, and M1's insistence that propositions themselves exist.

I want to raise a final problem for M2. Since true beliefs are in a one-to-one correspondence with facts, and 'fact' and 'truth' denote the same thing, one might wonder what philosophical use 'facts' are if they are as finely grained as the individual beliefs to which they correspond and which they make true. According to M2, a true belief is a belief which has the property *truth(b),* a property it has because it bears the unanalyzable relation of reference to a truth (fact), which itself has an unanalyzable property of *truth(f),* though this property of truth

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[40] Moore, 1956, p. 336.

[41] Asay's 2013 reading of Moore here is an example of the interpretation I find questionable (though not entirely incorrect). For instance, on p. 75 he writes "By 1911, Moore and Russell had both moved away from primitivism and adopted a form of correspondence theory." But if I am correct above, Moore's correspondence theory is compatible with some form of primitivism regarding *truth,* as he explicitly endorses the primitivity of *truth(f)* to explain the correspondence relation that grounds *truth(b)*, and accounts for why *truth(b)* is not a primitive property.

ought not to be confused with the property of truth which belongs to beliefs. One could be

forgiven for thinking that truths or facts have simply been posited to serve as the referents of true

beliefs, provided we are *already* wedded to the thesis that truth must be in some sense grounded.

When we reflect that Moore thinks that the fact that x and the true belief that x both 'have the

same name,' and that "'truths', therefore, are one of the two classes of things with regard to

which it may, I think , be plausibly said that they are, but don't exist"[42] we might wonder why

Moore doesn't simply say that true beliefs possess the unanalyzable property of *truth,* and

thereby avoid appealing to an unanalyzable referring relation to a non-existent entity (which *is*)

which shares the same name as the belief, but itself has a different unanalyzable property of

truth(f).[43]

1.5 Russell Abandons the Primitive Thesis

By 1912 Russell has fleshed out his multiple-relations theory of judgment, and with it a

correspondence theory of truth containing an explicit ontology of both truth-bearers (judgments

and beliefs) and truth makers (facts). Taking the case of Othello believing that Desdemona loves

Cassio, Russell claims the following (which we may call R4):

> The relation involved in judging or believing must, if falsehood is to be duly
>
> allowed for, be taken to be a relation between several terms, not between two…
>
> This relation, therefore is a relation of four terms since Othello is also one of the
>
> terms of the relation…Thus the actual occurrence, at the moment when Othello is

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[42] Moore, 1956, p 338.

[43] Perhaps Moore is worried that true beliefs need to be grounded in the right manner by a relation to the way the world is. Tarki's satisfaction relation arguably achieves this grounding without positing entities that correspond to sentences as a whole; Frege's 'the true' might be seen as another possible way to ground truth. In short, it's not clear that Moore needs to postulate *facts* to satisfy the grounding requirement. I will have more to say on this subject in upcoming chapters.

> entertaining his belief, is that the relation called 'believing' is knitting together into one complex whole the four terms Othello, Desdemona, loving, and Cassio. What is called belief or judgment, is nothing but this relation of believing or judging, which relates a mind to several things other than itself.[44]

This passage warrants careful scrutiny. Notice that for R4, a belief isn't something that a believer is put into a one-to-one relation with, rather a belief is a relation involving the believer himself as a constituent. Thus in the passage above it is the believing relation which knits together Othello, Desdemona, loving and Cassio, and knits them together in a specific ordered sense (this 'ordered sense' is to differentiate the belief in question from, for example, Desdemona's belief that Othello loves Cassio, which has the same *constituents* as the belief in question, yet the two beliefs must be distinct).

Facts must be different from true beliefs if they are to serve as truth-makers, and I alluded above that Russell has a clever solution for differentiating true beliefs from facts. A belief is, remember a relation between a believer, the term(s) of the belief, and a relation. A fact, on the other hand, is a complex composed of the terms of the belief united by the relation:

> The relation 'loving', as it occurs in the act of believing, is one of the objects - it is a brick in the structure, not the cement. The cement is the relation 'believing'. When the belief is true, there is another complex unity, in which the relation which was one of the objects of the belief relates the other objects… the relation which was one of the objects [of the belief] occurring now as the cement that binds together the other objects of the belief.[45]

Thus we are able to distinguish between facts and true beliefs, and to see that facts are not constituents of true beliefs, although true beliefs and the facts with which they correspond do

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[44] Russell, 1912, p 21.

[45] Russell, 1912, p 23.

have constituents in common. In belief it is the believing relation which unites all the terms of the belief (even when a term in the belief is itself a relation), while in the corresponding fact the relation which was a term in a belief is now what knits together the terms into a complex whole, a fact.

With R4 Russell is able to differentiate fact from true belief, and seems to have an account of correspondence that seems plausible for at least *some* classes of beliefs. However, well-known problems arise for R4 when we believe (truly, it would seem!) of non-existing objects that they do not exist, or of existing objects that they have metaphysically impossible properties, etc. Another possible problem for R4, like M2, consists in how finely grained facts are, and how we are to individuate the facts that any true belief corresponds to (I'll explore these challenges further in Chapter 3).

1.6 Conclusion

We've established that both Russell and Moore maintained versions of the primitive thesis at different points in their intellectual development, only to abandon the thesis. Importantly, we've seen how decisions concerning the nature of belief, reference, and predication constrain possible explanations of truth and the truth-making relation. In the next chapter we'll discuss the views of Frege, who accepted and never abandoned a version of the primitive thesis.

"Truth is obviously something so primitive and simple that it is not possible to reduce it to anything still simpler." -Gottlob Frege, *Logic*.[46]

Chapter 2

History of the Primitive Thesis: Frege

2.1 Overview

In 1919 Gottlob Frege wrote to the historian of science Ludwig Darmstaedter, outlining the achievements that Frege thought he had made:

> What is distinctive about my conception of logic is that I begin by giving pride of place to the content of the word 'true', and then immediately go on to introduce a thought as that to which the question 'is it true?' is in principle applicable. So I do not begin with concepts and put them together to form a thought or judgement; I come by the parts of a thought by analyzing the thought… Truth is not part of a thought.[47]

Frege, like Moore and Russell (at times), subscribed to the thesis that truth is primitive; in his words, truth is *sui generis* and indefinable. Unlike Moore and Russell, Frege, as hinted in the above quote, never abandoned the thesis. Frege has been interpreted as having two main arguments for the primitivity of truth*,* and it is worth exploring whether or not these arguments are successful. An argument, dubbed the 'Treadmill', is present in Frege, and it is in Frege that we see the seeds of a family of arguments that have been collectively dubbed the 'Slingshot'. I propose first to articulate Frege's account of predication and reference, and then to analyze the

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[46] Frege, 1897, *Logic*, in Beaney, 1997, p 228.

[47] Frege, 1919, *Notes for Ludwig Darmstaedter*, in Beaney, 1997 p 363.

Treadmill and Slingshot arguments for the primitivity of truth. While Frege's account of predication might seem an odd place to start, an account of predication does have implications for a theory of truth, in that such an account must specify what it is that predicates contribute to the truth conditions of the sentences in which they occur. Likewise, Frege's theory of reference is interesting because Frege thinks not only that singular terms like names and definite descriptions refer to objects, but that sentences as a whole refer as well; this is part of the reason for his claim that all true sentences refer to the same object.[48] The present chapter will articulate Frege's conception of predication, focusing on the role that predicates and singular terms play in sentences. I'll discuss an argument that has come to be known as Frege's Treadmill, as well as an argument I'll call Frege's Proto-Slingshot. I argue that while both provide Fregean reasons for the thesis that truth is in some sense primitive, the latter argument relies on premises that are, though not plainly false, dubitable.

2.2 Frege on Predication

Frege's analysis of the different roles that denoting/referring expressions and predicates play in the composition of a thought is novel (though, I'll argue, ultimately unsatisfactory). The first appearance of Frege's notion of predication appears in an 1882 letter to philosopher Anton Marty:

> A concept is unsaturated in that it requires something to fall under it; hence it cannot exist on its own. That an individual falls under it is a judgeable content, and here the concept appears as a predicate and is always predicative. In this

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[48] As we'll see in Chapter 5, Davidson develops a theory of predication that is Fregean in spirit, but that employs the work of Tarski to eliminate both sentential reference and to give a different (and I'll argue better) account of predication, and of the relationship between predicates and properties.

case, where the subject is an individual, the relation of the subject to predicate is

not a third thing added to the two, but it belongs to the content of the predicate,

which is what makes the predicate unsaturated. Now, I do not believe that concept

formation can precede judgement, because this would presuppose the independent

existence of concepts, but I think of a concept as having arisen by decomposition

from a judgeable content.[49]

This passage clarifies and condenses a number of themes littered throughout Frege's published

papers. We can see his insistence on the primacy of sentential meaning over term meaning, in

that term meaning is arrived at via decomposition of a thought. We can also see his insistence on

the primacy of simple declarative predication in the study of language, in that what we

decompose are those things that are *judgeable*, i.e. true or false.

Predicates are unsaturated for Frege because they take singular terms in order to form a

complete sentence. Singular terms have a referent or *Bedeutung*; names refer to the objects they

are names of, definite descriptions to the objects which they definitely describe.[50] The

unsaturated part of a sentence (predicates) also have a *Bedeutung*, so a predicate refers to a

concept, where concepts are *functions;* functions take arguments and output values. Predicates

refer to functions that take objects and output truth values. One can individuate (create, form,

etc.) a predicate by taking a judgeable content and removing one or more of the singular terms

involved. Thus, by removing 'Donald' from 'Donald is bald', we arrive at the one-place

predicate '_ is bald' which refers to a concept/function that maps objects onto truth values: it

maps Donald onto The True. By removing 'Donald' and 'Van' from 'Donald is as bald as Van'

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[49] Frege, 1882, *Letter to Marty*, in Beaney, 1997 p 81.

[50] As I hope this makes clear, I'm using 'refer' in this chapter broadly, intended to mean the relation between a bit of language (whether name, description, predicate, or sentence) and its *Bedeutung*.

we arrive at the two-place predicate '_ is as bald as _'. Predicates, referring to functions, are by

themselves unsaturated: an n-place predicate doesn't express a thought until it is saturated with n

objects.[51]

Frege's intuition for claiming that predicates have a *Bedeutung* is as follows. Having just

established that proper names have a *Bedeutung*, Frege argues:

> Now it is surely unlikely that a proper name should behave so differently from the
> rest of a singular sentence that it is only in its case that the existence of a
> *Bedeutung* should be of importance. If the thought as a whole is to belong to the
> realm of truth, we must rather assume that something in the realm of *Bedeutung*
> must correspond to the rest of the sentence, which has the unsaturated part of the
> thought for its sense…. It is inconceivable that it is only for the proper names that
> there can be a question of *Bedeutung* and not for the other parts of the sentence
> which connect them…. If we split up a sentence into a proper name and the
> remainder, then this remainder has for its sense an unsaturated part of a thought.
> But we call its *Bedeutung* a concept.[52]

I'd note at the outset that the reasoning employed here doesn't seem compelling; indeed one

might think it odd that Frege insist that predicates have referents in the way proper names do.

That is, it isn't clear that predicates refer *because* proper names refer, which seems to be what

Frege claims. Predicates, one might say, *predicate*, while names *name*. One might plausibly

claim that the different parts of language serve different purposes by playing different linguistic

roles.[53]

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[51] Strictly speaking Frege deals only with one-place predicates when he is speaking of concepts as functions.

[52] Frege, 1906, *Introduction to Logic*, in Beaney 1997 p 295.

[53] This is precisely the move that Davidson makes with regard to predication, which I will concentrate on in Chapters 4 and 5.

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Not only does Frege think that concepts have a *Bedeutung*, he also argues that sentences themselves have a *Bedeutung*, though it is unclear whether his argument for why this should be so succeeds. In his *Introduction to Logic* Frege argues for the claims that sentences as wholes have referents, and these referents are truth values:

> We have seen that it is true of parts of sentences that they have *Bedeutungen*.
> What of a whole sentence, does this have a *Bedeutung* too? If we are concerned
> with truth, if we are aiming at knowledge, then we demand of each proper name
> occurring in a sentence that it should have a *Bedeutung*. On the other hand, we
> know that as far as the sense of a sentence, the thought, is concerned it does not
> matter whether the parts of the sentence have *Bedeutunge*n or not. It follows that
> there must be something associated with a sentence which is different from the
> thought, something to which it is essential that the parts of the sentence should
> have *Bedeutungen*. This is to be called the *Bedeutung* of the sentence. But the
> only thing to which this is essential is what I call the truth-value - whether the
> thought is true or false…We have two truth-values, the True and the False. If a
> sentence can be split up into parts, each of which has a *Bedeutung*, then the
> sentence also has a *Bedeutung*. The True and the False are to be regarded as
> objects, for both the sentence and its sense , the thought, are complete in
> character, not unsaturated… A sentence proper is a proper name, and its
> *Bedeutung*, if it has one, is a truth-value: the True or the False.[54]

This passage needs unpacking. First, Frege claims it is only when we are aiming at truth that we are concerned that names in a given sentence have a referent. That is, sentences containing non-referring names don't have a truth value, because there is no object for a concept to map onto a truth value, although a sentence employing a non-referring name may express a thought or have a sense. Since this is so, when Frege says there must be something to which it is essential that

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[54] Frege, 1906, *Introduction to Logic*, in Beaney 1997 pp 296-297.

the parts of a sentence have a *Bedeutung*, he has in mind that he has just established that the only such thing that *could* be essential to all sentences that are truth-apt is a truth-value. What is missing from a sentence like "Godzilla flies" (which expresses a perfectly sensible *thought)* is an *object* named by 'Godzilla' to be mapped by the concept named by the predicate '_ flies' onto a truth value.[55] When we are concerned with truth we are concerned with what is actually the case, and what is the case depends on the *kinds* of objects there are and the *way* those objects are. This is truthful predication. What isn't clear, and what is essential to Frege's argument, is the implied claim that 'there must be something associated with a sentence which is different from the thought' and that if that associated thing is the sentence's truth-value, then the truth-value is the sentence's *Bedeutung*. That is, one might plausibly claim that sentences have truth values, but that the relation between a sentence and its truth value is not a naming relation.

The second part of the quote makes a different argument for the claim that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is a truth-value. The argument appears to be that if a sentence can be split up into parts, each of which has a *Bedeutung*, then the sentence itself has a *Bedeutung*. This however, proves too much. For if this were true, it is hard to see why paragraphs would not also have *Bedeutungen*, given that they too can be split up into parts (sentences) which have individual *Bedeutungen,* and what goes for paragraphs goes for chapters, books, and the collected literary output of a given individual. The principle 'things with parts that have *Bedeutungen* must themselves have a *Bedeutung*' admits of a reductio ad absurdum here. This is not to claim that the conclusion of Frege's argument (that sentences as a whole have a *Bedeutung*) is false. All I am claiming is that the conclusion is, as stated, unsupported.

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[55] Questions about truth in fiction are outside the scope of this discussion.

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The third part of the quote above states Frege's thesis that truth values are objects, sentences are names, and that the objects that sentences name are truth-values. This claim foreshadows claims that will become apparent in discussion of Frege's Treadmill argument. The True is an object, and, as we have seen, the relation between objects and language is the naming relation. Thus, the relation between sentences and the True is a relation of naming, not of predication. The predicate '_is true' isn't a proper predicate in the way that '_is bald' is, and therefore truth isn't a *property* of sentences. This is clear when Frege says the following:

> If we say 'the thought it true', we seem to be ascribing truth to the thought as a property…But here we are misled by language. We do not have the relation of an object to a property, but that of the sense of a sign to its *Bedeutung*. In fact at bottom the sentence 'It is true that 2 is prime' says no more than '2 is prime'.[56]

We should note that properties are the kinds of things that are predicated of objects. That is, they are related to predicate terms and not to object terms. Thus, since predicates refer to concepts that map objects onto truth values, it would be odd if truth were a property, since The True is an object, and the relationship between objects and language is one of naming. So, for Frege, *there is no concept* TRUTH, as truth is an *object* which is *named* by all and only those sentences which are true (sentences whose concept maps an object onto The True). This will become apparent in the following.

2.3 Frege's Treadmill

Asay's recent work on the primitive theory of truth takes up and analyzes an argument for the primitive thesis that Asay dubs 'Frege's Treadmill'. Asay is concerned with whether TRUTH

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[56] Frege, 1906, *Introduction to Logic*, in Beaney, 1997 p 297.

is a primitive concept, and so he assumes (contra Frege) that TRUTH is a concept, and marshals

Fregean arguments for his own contention that the concept TRUTH is primitive but the property

truth is metaphysically deflationary.[57] Since, unlike Asay, I don't believe Frege thinks TRUTH

is a property *at all*, it will be useful to quote the Frege in full to appreciate what Frege himself

was getting at. In his unpublished *Logic*, Frege uses the Treadmill to argue that thoughts cannot

be things that are private and mental (they must be Fregean *senses*):

> If a thought, like an idea, were something private and mental, then the truth of a
> thought could surely only consist in a relation to something that was not private or
> mental. So if we wanted to know whether a thought was true, we should have to
> ask whether the relation in question obtained and thus whether the thought that
> this relation obtained was *true*. And so we should be in the position of a man on a
> treadmill who makes a step forewords and upwards, but the step he treads on
> keeps giving way and he falls back to where he was before.
> A thought is something impersonal. If we see the sentence '2+3=5' written on a
> wall, we have no difficulty at all in recognizing the thought expressed by it, and
> we do not need to know who has written it there in order to understand it.[58]

Here it seems clear that Frege is making a kind of third-man argument against a type of

correspondence theory of truth. If thoughts are private entities (instead of Fregean senses), and if

truth is a property, then the truth of a thought could only consist in a relation between the private

entity and something non-private. Frege seems to be saying that in order for us to discover

whether that relation obtained, we would have to ask ourselves whether it was true that the

relation obtained. Frege makes a similar point in his published work *The Thought*:

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[57] The discussion here will concern only whether TRUTH is primitive. Discussions about properties being metaphysically substantive or not will be addressed in Chapter 5.

[58] Frege, 1897, *Logic*, in Beaney 1997 p 234.

But could we not maintain that there is truth when 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 the 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 always arise whether it were *true* that the characteristics were present. So we should be going round in a circle. So it seems likely that the content of the word 'true' is *sui generis* and indefinable.[59]

Asay (2013) has made explicit three versions of Frege's Treadmill: first as a circularity argument, then as a regress, and finally as an argument concerning omnipresence. Asay thinks only the third argument is sound, but notes correctly that it is only the first that can explicitly be found in Frege proper, though the latter is arguably available to a Fregean.

Asay's reason for finding Frege's circularity and regress Treadmills unsatisfying is that the arguments seems to turn on the following claim, where C is a substantive definition of TRUTH: "For any truth-bearer *p*, in order to determine that *p* is C one must first determine that it

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[59] Frege 1918, *The Thought*, in Beaney 1997 p 327.

is true that p is C, thereby deploying the concept TRUTH."[60] This seems to make explicit what

Frege says above: it is also problematic. The claim exploits the material equivalence of T-

sentences and tries to generate an epistemic priority that is at best questionable.[61] As Asay notes,

if C is a substantive definition of TRUTH, C has a kind of epistemic or explanatory priority over

TRUTH; what it is for something to be true is explained by that thing's being C. It will of course

be the case that there is a material equivalency between the three claims 'p', 'p is true', and 'p is

C', but only the latter is *explanatorily basic*. Material equivalency is not the same as explanatory

equivalency in this case: consider as an analogue BACHELOR, UNMARRIED, and MAN. A

substantive definition of BACHELOR establishes a material equivalency (hence the material

biconditional) between BACHELOR and UNMARRIED MALE. We explain BACHELOR in

terms of UNMARRIED and MALE, we do not explain UNMARRIED and MALE in terms of

BACHELOR.[62] Thus, "*what it is* to be C is not to be true, according to the view that defines

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[60] Here is Asay's formal argument from circularity:
(1) There is some characteristic C that defines the concept TRUTH such that, for any truth-bearer p, P is true if and only if p is C. [Supposition]
(2) For any concept A and characteristic B, if A is defined by B, then in order to determine that something is A one must first determine that it is B. [Premise]
(3) For any truth-bearer p, in order to determine that p is true one must first determine that p is C. [From (1) and (2)]
(4) For any concept A and characteristic B, if A is defined by B, then in order to determine that something is B, one must do so without deploying the concept A, on pain of epistemic circularity. [Premise]
(5) For any truth-bearer p, in order to determine that p is C, one must do so without deploying the concept TRUTH, on pain of epistemic circularity. [From (1) and (4)]
(6) For any truth-bearer p, in order to determine that p is C, one must first determine that it is true that p is C, thereby deploying the concept TRUTH. [Premise]
(7) For any truth-bearer p, it is impossible to determine that p is true without confronting an epistemic circularity. [From (3), (5), and (6)]
(8) For some truth-bearer p, it is possible to determine that p is true without confronting an epistemic circularity.
(9) Contradiction [From (7) and (8)]
(10) There is no characteristic C that denies the concept TRUTH such that, for any truth-bearer p, p is true if and only if p is C. [Reductio on (1)-(9)]. Asay, pp 140-141. The regress argument is similarly structured, and similarly problematic.

[61] Asay 142-144.

[62] The bachelor example is straight from Asay.

TRUTH in terms of C. Instead, what it is to be true is to be C."[63] This reverses the epistemic

priority, demanding that, when determining that p is C, we *first* determine that it is true that p is

C. If C is truly an explanatory definition of TRUTH this demand is unwarranted, so this version

of the Treadmill fails. Asay correctly notes that the re-interpretation of the Treadmill as a regress

argument fails as well, and for the same reason, and puts forward what he calls the argument

from omnipresence in its stead, claiming that the argument from omnipresence is a successful

argument that TRUTH is indefinable.

2.4 The Argument From Omnipresence

The argument from omnipresence finds support in Frege's *The Thought*. Remembering

Frege's account of predication, Frege argued that "We cannot recognize a property of a thing

without at the same time finding the thought *this thing has this property* to be true."[64] As we

have seen, by 'thought' Frege means 'judgeable content,' which just means truth-evaluable (is

susceptible to the question 'is it true?'). This is not an uncontentious claim, but I think it is

plausible. The idea, then, is that even the most basic form of predication involves possession of

the concept of truth, because possession of the concept of truth is a *necessary condition* for

thought.[65] Frege says:

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[63] Asay, 2013, p 145.

[64] Frege, 1918, *The Thought,* in Beaney 1997 p 328.

[65] We'll see this point echoed in Davidson, who maintains (across both papers and decades) that possession of the concept is both necessary and sufficient for thought. Slightly modifying Frege's point here, in "Thought and Talk" (1975) Davidson says "It is often wrongly thought that the semantical concept of truth is redundant, that there is no difference between asserting that a sentence *s* is true, and using *s* to make an assertion. What may be right is a redundancy theory of belief, that to believe that p is not to be distinguished from the belief that p is true." *Truth and Interpretation*, p 170.

> One can, indeed, say: 'The thought that 5 is a prime number is true'. But closer
> examination shows that nothing more has been said than in the simple sentence '5
> is a prime number'.[66]

So Frege's claim here is that the thought 'The thought that 5 is a prime number is true' is the *same thought* expressed by '5 is a prime number'. Provided that TRUTH is a concept, if this is true, then of course the converse holds as well, and any predicative sentence 'P' expresses the same thought as 'it is true that P', which, as we have noted, makes possession of the concept of truth a necessary condition of thought generally. Frege's argument then turns on any definition of truth of the form 'x is true iff N'. Since 'P' and 'it is true that P' express the same thought, the purportedly informative definition 'x is true iff N' expresses the same thought as 'it is true that x is true iff N'. Thus, to understand the supposedly substantive definition, one *necessarily* has to possess the concept TRUTH. Asay has formalized this argument, relying on the following premise concerning the Omnipresence of Truth (OT): For all P, the conceptual content that composes the thought that P is identical to the conceptual content that composes the thought that it is true that P.[67] Since the thought P is *identical* to the thought that it is true that P, there is no epistemic priority being wrongfully exploited, as there (arguably) was in the problematic claims of the Treadmill construed as a circularity argument. The priority problems plaguing the various forms of Frege's Treadmill appear to have been avoided, and we have an argument that the concept TRUTH is indefineable.

Though I sympathize with Asay's reconstruction, I want to point out why I think Frege would not, and that he would think the above also constitutes an argument for the conclusion that

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[66] Frege, 1892, *On* Sinn *and* Bedeutung, in Beaney, 1997 p 158. It might be noted that Frege might be taken here to sow the seeds that Ramsey and Horwich harvest with their (respective) redundancy and deflationary theories.

[67] Asay, 2013, p 167.

TRUTH isn't a proper concept at all. Remember, Frege maintains a sharp distinction between objects and concepts. What's more, the classes of concepts and objects appear to be mutually exclusive. Singular terms have as their *Bedeutungen* objects, and the *Bedeutungen* of predicates are concepts. Concepts just are functions that take the *Bedeutungen* of singular terms and map them on to other objects: truth values. The True and The False are *objects*. Since they are objects *they can't be concepts*. In his *Comments on Sinn and Bedeutung* Frege says:

> We cannot avoid words like 'the concept' but when we use them we must always bear their inappropriateness in mind. From what we have said it follows that objects and concepts are fundamentally different and cannot stand in for one another. The same goes for the corresponding words or signs. Proper names cannot really be used as predicates.[68]

Frege is already committed to the claim that sentences have as their *Bedeutungen* truth values, so of course he would say that '_is true' isn't a proper predicate. Suppose '_is true' were a proper predicate. Now consider the kinds of objects the predicate '_is true' would apply to: it seems clear that the only entities that would saturate the predicate '_is true' are propositional, i.e. whole sentences themselves. Since predicates refer to concepts, and concepts are functions which take the *Bedeutungen* of singular terms and map them on to a truth value, and since a sentence is a singular term with a truth value as its *Bedeutung*, the predicate '_is true' just maps truth values onto truth values. Clearly, then, '_is true' would map The True onto The True. This line of reasoning leads Frege to think that '_is true' does no work, and therefore that '_is true' is not a proper predicate at all. Note however, that what motivates this argument are Frege's dual claims

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[68] Frege, 1892, *Comments on* Sinn *and* Bedeutung, in Beaney, 1997 p 174-175. The flip side of this coin is the much discussed passage where Frege argues that the concept 'horse' isn't a concept, for when we say 'the concept 'horse'' we treat the concept like an object, and objects are not concepts, they are not unsaturated. The horse example is Frege hammering home the idea that concepts are not objects. When I say '_is true' is not a proper predicate I mean to hammer home what I think Frege would say, namely that objects are not concepts.

that concepts are functions, and that sentences have *Bedeutungen*. It is only because Frege is committed to functions being the *Bedeutungen* of predicates that sentences *must* have referents (if concepts are functions they must map arguments onto *something*), and it is only because Frege thinks that predicates must have *Bedeutungen* that he chooses functions (that predicates refer to functions explains the unity of the sentence - predicates are unsaturated until objects saturate them). Neither of these claims is immune from doubt.

I agree with Asay that the argument from omnipresence is the best possible way to construct a Fregean argument concerning the primitive nature of TRUTH, and like Asay I want to claim that there is a concept of TRUTH. Doing this requires taking a much broader conception of what a concept is than Frege's strict functional account; concepts must be something like 'the constituents of thought'. So, while something like the argument from omnipresence is useful to have in one's arsenal defending the primitivity of truth, it will be useful to people (like Asay) who have a broader conception of what a concept is. Frege doesn't need such an argument; since The True is an object '_ is true' can't be a proper predicate.

Asay defends OT from attacks on all fronts, but I think he misses articulating a key *virtue* of OT: it helps us determine which kinds of *things* can properly be said to *think*. If possession of the concept TRUTH is a necessary condition of thought, we can thereby rule out thermostats, sunflowers, and stones as candidates for the possession of thoughts or beliefs. Only a creature that recognizes that they can make a mistake, can mis-apply a concept, can be said to be in possession of the concept TRUTH.[69] Asay's argument for the equivalence of 'P' and 'It is true that P' concerns the indistinguishability of the two thoughts. While I sympathize with this claim

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[69] I'll air these claims out in the end of Chapter 4, which concerns a positive proposal of the Primitive Thesis.

and with Asay's argument for it, I think that we can supplement them with a Davidsonian

account of *interpretation*. Such an account tells us how to go about interpreting the (hitherto

untranslated) behavior of others, but also (and this is what is important for the present point)

when it makes sense to attribute thoughts to other entities. We are justified in attributing thought

to such entities when they appear to possess the concept of truth; this is just what rules out

thermostats, sunflowers, and stones.[70]

    I want to register one further slight hesitation about the argument Asay is pushing with

OT.[71] Just because we must employ a concept in the definiens of a definition, that might not

preclude us from *shedding light* on that very concept by means of providing an account of that

concept that looks like a definition, but is in fact conceptually circular. It is important to note

that the argument from omnipresence is compatible with a strong correspondence theory of truth

(a statement is true iff it corresponds to a fact) provided that the correspondence theory of truth is

not taken to be a conceptually reductive analysis of TRUTH. If the conclusion of the argument

from omnipresence is true, then of course there is no non-circular definition of TRUTH in terms

of more basic concepts. However it can still be illuminating to relate TRUTH to other concepts

like those of BELIEF, OBJECTIVITY. Furthermore, provided that we can individuate facts in a

non-problematic way, a strong correspondence theory of truth seems compatible with the

conceptual primitivity of TRUTH, in the same way that an account of yellow in terms of EMR

radiation can be illuminating even though (arguably, following Moore) YELLOW is a primitive

concept.

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[70] This will be made more explicit in Chapter 4.

[71] Or, at least with an *interpretation* of Asay's argument. Asay admits later that the omnipresence argument is consistent with a full-fledged correspondence theory, and hints that he is sympathetic to such an account of truth, provided that it isn't taken as a conceptually reductive account.

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2.5 A Fregean Proto-Slingshot

      Slingshot arguments typically purport to show that if truth bearers stand in a referring

relationship to anything, they must refer to something no more finely grained than the truth

predicate itself. It is Frege who sowed the seeds of Slingshot-type arguments, in his seminal *On

Sense and Reference,* though it is unclear that Frege intends his discussion to be an explicit

argument. What I'll call the Fregean Proto-Slingshot aims to show that *because* sentences (in

addition to singular terms) stand in a referring relation to *something*, they must refer to their truth

value. Frege's passage is worth quoting in full:

> If our supposition that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is it's truth-value is correct,
> the latter must remain unchanged when a part of the sentence is replaced by an
> expression with the same *Bedeutung*. And this is in fact the case. Leibniz gives
> the definition 'Those things are the same which can be substituted for one another
> without loss of truth'. If we are dealing with sentences for which the *Bedeutung*
> of their component parts is at all relevant, then what feature except the truth-value
> can be found that belongs to such sentences quite generally and remains
> unchanged by substitutions of the kind just mentioned? If now the truth value of
> a sentence is it's *Bedeutung*, then on the one hand all true sentences have the same
> *Bedeutung*, and so, on the other hand, do all false sentences. From this we see
> that in the *Bedeutung* of the sentence all that is specific is obliterated.[72]

Frege here makes no distinction between the different roles that names and descriptions play in

picking out objects and events. The argument I have in mind (and that many see implicit in

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[72] Frege, 1892, *On* Sinn *and* Bedeutung, in Beaney, 1997, p 158-159. I've taken the liberty of translating the
Leibniz from the latin that appears in Frege's paper proper. The phrasing is no accident; Frege uses just this
conception of identity in his *Foundations of Mathematics*, noting that it is a definition of identity (there he claims
identity, sameness, and equality are negligibly different terms for the same concept). See Frege, 1884, *Foundations
of Mathematics*, in Beaney, 1997, p 112.

Frege) can be constructed along the following lines. Take 'the morning star', 'the evening star', and 'Venus'. Since, according to Frege's semantics, all three of these terms have the same *Bedeutung*, they are substitutable, *salva veritate*, in sentences which contain them.[73] Note also that the Leibnizian account of identity that we find not only in Frege's *On Sense and Reference*, but also in his *Foundations of Arithmetic,* seems to license separate, but sometimes conflated, principles of substitution. Co-referential names may be substituted without loss of truth, but note that co-denoting definite descriptions may also be so substituted. Thus in 'Cicero denounced Catiline', we may substitute 'Tully' for 'Cicero' without a change in truth value, and since we may do so, the *Bedeutung* of the sentences as a whole does not change. We may also substitute 'the greatest Roman orator' for 'Cicero', provided that Cicero was indeed the greatest Roman orator, without changing the *Bedeutung* of the sentence. Assuming that Cicero was indeed the greatest Roman orator, the sentence 'Cicero was the Greatest roman orator' would have to have the same *Bedeutung* as 'Cicero was the individual x such that x was the greatest roman orator and P', where P is *any true sentence whatsoever*. Finally, when we reflect that 'Cicero was the individual x such that x was the greatest roman orator and P' is true if and only if P is true (since 'Cicero' and 'the greatest roman orator' both pick out the same person), P must refer to the same thing that 'Cicero was the greatest Roman orator' does. Hence, the obliteration of specifics that Frege speaks of above, for it seems that what P and 'Cicero was the greatest Roman orator' share could be *nothing other than their truth value*.

My Fregean Proto-Slingshot delivers the conclusion that all true sentences refer to the same thing, an entity which Frege calls 'The True.' It is *not* clear, however, that the argument

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[73] The present discussion excludes intensional contexts.

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does so on premises that are compelling under close reading. First, it is unclear why sentences as

a whole ought to stand in a referring relationship to anything at all.[74] Second, the Leibnizian

account of identity and substitutability employed here is extremely permissive, and the argument

seems problematically question-begging. Frege's Leibnizian substitution principle endorses the

biconditional (let us call it LSP) 'one may substitute A for B in any sentence containing B

without loss of truth (and vice versa; B for A) iff A=B'.   Due to the presence of the

biconditional, this tells us not only when we can substitute A and B in a sentence, but also when

things are the same, or rather when 'A' and 'B' have the same *Bedeutung,* and thus is an account

of identity. Leibniz intended his principle to be apply only to singular terms, while Frege thinks

A and B can be interpreted to stand for expressions generally: names, descriptions, clauses, or

even entire sentences. This, combined with the use of the biconditional is wildly permissive, and

arguably begs the question.[75]

LSP, as a biconditional, entails both a substitution principle and an identity principle, as it

may be read in either direction. Consider if we modify LSP to be read only as a conditional.

Read in one direction, LSP would then be *only a substitution principle*. Let us call this the Weak

Leibnizian Substitution Principle (WLSP): one may substitute A for B in a sentence containing B

without loss of truth (and vice versa; B for A) if A=B. This tells us when we may substitute A for

B in a sentence without loss of truth (when A is identical to B), but it does not tell us *when* A and

B are identical. Note the following sentences, where P is, again, any arbitrary true sentence:

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[74] The argument depends on assuming that sentences themselves have a *Bedeutung*. Abandoning this premise would allow us to escape the conclusion that all true sentences are co-referential. If sentences as a whole do not require a *Bedeutung*, the argument is a non-starter.

[75] I'm not here accusing *Frege* of begging the question (as he can arguably be read as explaining a consequence of his view, not as making an argument). Rather, I'm saying that the Fregean Proto-Slingshot, the argument *we* can assemble with Fregean *parts*, begs the question.

(1) Cicero was the greatest roman orator.

(2) Tully was the greatest roman orator.

(3) Tully was the unique x such that x was the greatest roman orator.

(4) Cicero was the unique x such that x was the greatest roman orator and such that all bachelors are unmarried.

(5) Cicero was Cicero

(6) Cicero was the unique x such that x was Cicero.

(7) Cicero was the unique x such that x was Cicero and P.

(8) P

(9) Davidson was bald and P.

(10) Davidson was bald and Cicero was the unique x such that x was Cicero and P.

Here we may see the substitution principle in action. In (1) - (7), the expressions on either side of

the copula all have the same *Bedeutung*. For Frege, if singular terms A and B (whether they be

descriptions or names) have the same *Bedeutung*, then A=B, and A may be substituted for B

salva veritate. Since (1)-(7) all say of Cicero that he was Cicero WLSP by itself licenses the

substitutions involved in moving from (1)-(7). What about the move from (7) to (8)? It isn't

obvious that (7) and (8) share the same *Bedeutung*, and since WLSP doesn't provide a criterion

for sameness of *Bedeutung* it is unclear whether (8) may be obtained from (7) in the same way

that, for instance, (2) can be derived from (1). WLSP alone does not appear to license the move

from (7) to (8).

Here we introduce the other half of the LSP biconditional. Read in this direction, it

becomes an identity principle, so I'll call it the Leibnizian Identity Principle (LIP): A=B if one

may substitute A for B in any sentence containing B without loss of truth (and vice versa; B for

A). Remembering that Frege wants LSP to apply not just to names and descriptions but to

expressions, it is important to note that (8) and (7) appear in (9) and (10) as expressions,

expressions which may be substituted without loss of truth. Application of LIP thus entails that

(7) and (8) have the same *Bedeutung*. When we remember that P is any arbitrary true sentence,

we can see why I think the Fregean slingshot begs the question; the biconditional in LSP, applied

to expressions (broadly construed to include some types of embedded sentences) *guarantees* that

the *Bedeutung* of any sentence be its truth value.[76] Thus, no one who objects to Frege's

conclusion will agree to his premises, particularly LIP with regard to expressions. Thus, we may

conclude that the Fregean proto-slingshot argument fails as an argument for the claim that all

true sentences are co-referential. Frege's argument *does* reinforce a point which will re-emerge

in our discussion of correspondence theories, which is that questions about substitution

principles and reference/denotation place constraints on our ontology. In later chapters, we'll see

how Church, Davidson, and Gödel(via Neale) constructed ever more *powerful* slingshot

arguments based on ever more *plausible* substitution principles.[77]

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[76] Strictly speaking the argument shows that all true sentences share a *Bedeutung*; since the only *other* feature they all share is their truth value, it is natural to assume that the *Bedeutung* they share *is* just their truth value.

[77] I should note again that it isn't *clear* that Frege intends his remarks to be slingshot-style *arguments*, rather than simply remarks about the consequences of his views; that is, as a kind of *stipulation* rather than a *conclusion*. What is clear is that both Church and Gödel, who both did explicitly craft slingshot arguments, take their inspiration from Frege. Church explicitly credits the argument to Frege. My purpose in formulating the Fregean Proto-Slingshot is twofold. First, I want to set the stage for the next chapter, in which I discuss slingshot arguments generally. Second though I don't claim the argument is explicitly put forward by Frege, it can certainly be assembled from parts found *in* Frege. Many readers of Frege think the argument *is* in Frege (as Church obviously does). For a contemporary analysis of Frege's work that *does* take Frege to be presenting a (failed) slingshot style collapsing argument, see Michael Beaney's *Frege: Making Sense* which concludes with "Even if we understand his motivations, then, the conclusion can only be that Frege offers us no convincing argument for his doctrine that the Bedeutung of a sentence is its truth-value" Beaney, 1996 pp 155-165,

"The limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to a sentence without simply repeating the sentence."

-Ludwig Wittgenstein[78]

Chapter 3

Truth, Correspondence and The Slingshot

3.1 Overview

Slingshot arguments, as a class, are arguments which are usually deployed in the fashion of a reductio.[79] That is, in Davidson's classic formulation, we assume that sentences refer to entities. Then, plausible-sounding premises are introduced concerning substitution principles and the effect substitutions have on the referent of any given sentence. The result is the conclusion that the referent of any sentence can be no more finely grained than the truth predicate itself. Such a conclusion is thought problematic for most, and so Davidson argues that we ought to drop the assumption that sentences stand in a referring relation to anything at all. However, there are other ways to cope with so-called slingshot arguments. One might, with Frege, accept the conclusion. One also might forego abandoning the claim that sentences are referring entities, and instead jettison the substitution principles which, together with the assumption that sentences refer to entities, weaponize the slingshot.

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[78] Wittgenstein, 1984, p 10e. The quote is altered slightly from the printed text, which inserts '(is the translation of)' parenthetically between 'corresponds to' and 'a sentence', and adds the claim that the thought expressed is the Kantian solution to philosophy. My omission of the parenthetical remark follows Hintikka, who thinks the omission is a better reading of the original german: Hintikka, 1997, p 24

[79] The clear exception we have discussed so far is Frege, who as we have just seen endorses the eleatic conclusion of his proto-slingshot.

In this chapter I'll start by looking at the appeal of certain varieties of so-called correspondence theories of truth: those that define truth as correspondence between a truth-bearer and a fact. These theories are the specific targets of the slingshot arguments I'll consider here. Next, I'll articulate three versions of so-called slingshot arguments. Starting with Church, and moving through Davidson and into Gödel (via Stephen Neale), I'll show that we can construct increasingly stronger slingshots, based on increasingly plausible substitution principles. Church and Davidson both argue that plausible substitution principles result in a kind of sentential-referential *fusion*: the referent of any truth apt sentence is no more finely grained than the truth predicate itself. I'll explain the force of Davidson's slingshot, while arguing that one might reject Davidson's conclusion by denying one of his substitution principles. Gödel's slingshot relies on more plausible substitution principles than either Church's or Davidson's, but again, these principles may be denied to avoid the conclusion that all sentences alike in truth value co-refer. I'll argue, however that denying the substitution principles which lead to the *fact fusion* problem spawns what I'll call the *fact fission* problem, which arises when the referents of sentences are as finely grained as the sentences themselves. I'll argue that the fission problem ought to be recognized, as the fusion problem generally is, as terminal to certain correspondence theories of truth.

3.2 Truth and Correspondence

Versions of the correspondence theory are attractive, as they seem to ground truth in a relation to reality; our language answers to the world. This is intuitively appealing, as it is a kind of *realism*. The version of correspondence I want to examine here is correspondence as a

reductive and explanatory definition of truth. According to a view of this sort, whatever truth-bearers *are*, those that are *true* are true *in virtue of* their correspondence to facts. Similarly, since truth bearers are *made* true by their correspondence to facts (so a correspondence theorist argues), correspondence to facts is the nature of truth, and by stating the correspondence thesis we are giving an explanatory definition of 'truth'. The correspondence theorist has an answer to Pilate; truth is correspondence with a fact: call this theory of truth (FC).

If (FC) is correct, it supports a kind of realism about truth; the correspondence thesis posits objective entities (facts) which truth-bearers either do or do not stand in a relationship of correspondence with. Supporters of (FC) argue that (FC) also implies the following truth-maker principle:

> (TM): Necessarily, if <p> is true, then there is some entity in virtue of which <p> is true.[80]

It is of course easy to see why (FC) would imply (TM); (FC) implies that there are entities true sentences correspond to. (TM) merely spells out the existential claim implicit in (FC) in an attempt to flesh out the truth-making relationship. (FC) does imply (TM). I also claim that (TM), if it is to be informative, implies something like (FC).

To see why (TM) implies something like (FC) let us pause and consider what kind of entities (TM) requires, in light of the discussion of Frege from the last chapter. Frege, remember, thought that sentences designated truth values, which were objects. Could truth values themselves serve as the entities (TM) requires? Surely not. For it arguably makes no sense to say that truth bearers are true in virtue of their correspondence to the truth values; and even if it

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[80] Rodriguez-Pereyra, in Beebee and Dodd, 2005, p 18. Pereyra makes clear that the entities he thinks are up for the truth-making job are *facts*.

does make sense (in that it is a coherent view), the view surely does no work as a substantive definition of truth. We have learned nothing about what truth *is* if the nature of truth is *defined* by relating true sentences to truth values. Truth values, then, would fail to satisfy as adequate truth-*makers* in a correspondence theory of truth.

Might other kinds of objects suffice? Surely the world is populated with physical objects: trees, birds, stones, and of course other humans. Let us suppose that abstract objects exist as well (as Davidson noted, they cost us nothing): equilateral triangles, the integers, love, democracy and the angst of postmodern man. Both classes of objects (the physical and the abstract) are just the types of objects that can be picked out by the subject phrases in predicative sentences. Will physical objects suffice as truth makers? I claim they cannot. For the claim 'Bill is angry' isn't made true by the object denoted by the subject term, as the predicate may be switched to '_ is placid' which would, provided that Bill really is angry, change the truth value of the sentence in question. Physical objects alone are insufficient to ground (TM). And it is difficult to see just how abstract objects of the sort we explicitly admitted into our ontology would suffice either. Triangles, democracy, and the integers all seem like very good candidates for being the objects that are named or described by the subject terms (names and descriptions) in sentences, but they don't seem to suffice as *truth-makers* for sentences.

What kind of objects might suffice as truth-makers? Stephen Neale has argued that the worry that (TM) requires more than just an ontology of objects is at the foundation of modern correspondence theories of truth[81]:

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[81] It isn't actually clear that Neale thinks that (TM) does require this. In the passage in question he is summarizing what he takes to be the Russellian position that resulted in the modern correspondence theory. So he does think this kind of reasoning was operative in Russell's thought, but it's unclear he thinks that it is sound.

Thus emerged a modern "correspondence" theory of truth: a sentence (or belief) is true just in case there is some fact to which it corresponds, where a fact is a non-linguistic entity in an objective external world. In recent years, the sort of rationale Russell provided for facts has been converted into something forming the core of a linguistic and modal statement of the correspondence theory. Every true sentence, it is said, must have a truth-maker, something in the world that grounds or explains its truth, for there is no other way of making sense of the idea that the world must be a certain way in order for the sentence in question to be true. T is a truth-maker for sentence S if, and only if, it is necessary that if T exists then S is true. Objects and properties seem not to suffice as truth-makers. Brutus and Caesar and the relation expressed by "stabbed" do not make [the] sentence ['Brutus stabbed Caesar'] true — they could all exist without the sentence being true, just as they all exist without ['Caesar stabbed Brutus'] being true. Enter facts: the fact that Brutus killed Caesar does the trick — or so it is claimed.[82]

At least some contemporary truth-maker theorists agree. Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra defends (TM), and is committed to (FC). He argues that *facts* must be the kind of entities which (TM) requires. Facts, being truth makers, are entities over and above the objects we have so far (explicitly) admitted in our ontology. It is facts, in explicitly this sense of an entity which is an *empirical truth-maker*, a 'non-linguistic entity in an objective external world', which a correspondence theorist must have in mind in order for (FC), coupled with (TM), to be explanatory.

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[82]Neale 2001 pp 85-86.

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3.3 Two Possible Problems for Correspondence Theories

I am going to argue that there are two particular problems which may arise for someone who holds the combination of (FC) and (TM): the problem of *fact fusion*, and the problem of *fact fission*. Just how many facts *are* there? I want to suggest that if (FC) is to be explanatory, there must be neither too few facts, nor too many. First, consider what would be the case if there were too few facts; suppose there were only one. Then, the situation appears to be similar to what we encountered in Frege: all true sentences refer to the same thing. This is problematic because it renders the correspondence definition of truth either circular or explanatorily useless or both; if the referent of a true sentence is no more finely grained than the truth predicate itself, then all true sentences refer to a single 'Great Fact.' And, it is hard to see what that Great Fact could be other than something like 'the true,' which renders the notion of correspondence explanatorily useless, circular, or both. For instead of a correspondence relation between all true sentences and a single entity 'the true' we could get by just as well with the one-place predicate '_is true'. Fact fusion, I argue, is terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM).[83]

Since I've argued that a fusion of facts is terminal to correspondence theories, we might now consider when a *plurality* of facts becomes problematic. Suppose I claimed that every unique true sentence corresponds to a unique fact. This, I want to argue, would be problematic. We know how to individuate sentences - how to tell them apart. What someone who endorses (FC) and (TM) seems to be claiming is that the *way* we sort the true sentences from the false sentences is by determining whether such a sentence corresponds to a fact - what it is for a

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[83] This is not a new argument: Davidson pushed this line of thought from 1967 until his death in 2003, and while many critics argue that the slingshot doesn't doom correspondence theories, they mostly agree that were there but one fact the correspondence theory would lose its attraction; they therefore often argue that the collapsing conclusion doesn't follow. See Neale 1995, 1997, and 2001 for detailed accounts of possible ways to skirt the collapsing conclusion.

sentence to be true is for that sentence (or whatever your favored truth-bearer is) to correspond to a fact. If the only way to individuate facts is by individuating the *truth-bearers* that correspond to them, facts don't appear to be capable of doing the empirical work in the way that the correspondence theorist endorsing (FC) and (TM) requires. Let me be more clear; there seem to be two options available if this is the case. First, since facts are (in this scenario) as finely grained as the sentences we use to individuate them, perhaps facts are propositional; facts just *are* true truth-bearers. This, however is terminal to (FC) and (TM), as facts are simply truths or truth-bearers, not truth-makers (this strategy just bleeds into a version of the identity theory of truth). Neither *Truths* nor truth-*bearers* can serve as truth-*makers*. The other option appears to be the following; holding on to (TM) and (FC), we realize that facts must be as finely grained as the true sentences to which they correspond; we therefore postulate entities that must be individuated by and correspond to the finely grained true truth-bearers. This is also problematic. Under this conception facts look like *theoretical postulates,* and theoretical postulates *cannot serve as empirical truth-makers*. If facts are individuated as finely as the sentences or propositions which purport to correspond to them, then we have what I call fact *fission*, which I claim is just as problematic as fact fusion, in that both are terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM).

3.4 Church's Slingshot

In his *Introduction to Mathematical Logic*, Church deploys what we may call Church's Slingshot as an argument for the Fregean conclusion that sentences name their truth-values.[84] Church is concerned with the following four sentences:

> (C1) Sir Walter Scott is the author of Waverly.
>
> (C2) Sir Walter Scott is the man who wrote twenty-nine Waverly Novels altogether.
>
> (C3) The number, such that Sir Walter Scott is the man who wrote that many Waverly Novels altogether, is twenty nine.
>
> (C4) The number of counties in Utah is twenty nine.[85]

Church reasons as follows. First, sentences have denotations. Second, parts of sentences also denote; descriptions and names denote objects. Third, when part x of a denoting phrase S which itself has a denotation is replaced by part y, and when part y has the same denotation as part x, then the denotation of S remains unchanged. Fourth, sentences which are synonymous denote the same thing.

So, (C1) and (C2) must have the same denotation, because what follows 'is' in both (C1) and (C2) is a denoting phrase, and though the *phrases* differ, their *denotation* does not; both denote Sir Walter Scott. The descriptive phrases 'the author of waverly' and 'the man who wrote twenty-nine Waverly Novels altogether' may be substituted without loss of sentential denotation.

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[84] Church's first slingshot was deployed in his 1943 review of Carnap's *Introduction to Semantics;* the slingshot I'll discuss is the one he deploys in his 1944 *Introduction to Mathematical logic*. This is for two reasons; the 1943 version is more technical than the 1944 version; more technical than need be. The 1944 version is no less plausible than the 1943 version, with the virtue of economy and clarity.

[85] Church, 1944, pp 24-25.

The same reasoning applies to (C3) and (C4), with respect to the descriptions before the last 'is' in each; each description denotes the number twenty-nine. The reasoning for believing that (C2) and (C3) denote the same thing, is that, according to Church, (C2) is synonymous with (C3), or "if it is not synonymous…it is at least so nearly so as to ensure its having the same denotation."[86] Since (C1), (C2), (C3), and (C4) all thereby share the same denotation, and since (C1) and (C4) appear to have nothing in common other than that they are both true, Church postulates two abstract objects, the true and the false, and claims that all true sentences denote the former, all false sentences correspond to the latter.[87]

Church's conclusion would be terminal to a combination of (FC) and (TM), as it would be a case of fact fusion. We should note that Church *accepts* the conclusion; he presents the argument originally in a critical review of Carnap's semantics, *against* Carnap's claim that sentences denote their meanings.[88] Church is arguing *for* the Fregean idea, discussed last chapter, that meanings are *not* the denotations of sentences but rather what those sentences *express*. Church is happy with the eleatic conclusion that all true sentences share a denotation; he will be the last author we consider who takes solace in the claim that all true sentences co-denote.

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[86] Church, 1944, p 25.

[87] Church, 1944, p 26.

[88] Strictly speaking, Church's argument concerns meanings, not facts (that is, it concerns propositional content, not truth-makers). This concern is what motivates his claim that C2 and C3 co-denote (they are synonymous, or at least nearly so). I don't elaborate on ways to avoid Church's slingshot, but since it supposedly concerns meanings and not truth-makers, someone concerned with avoiding Church's conclusion might agree that C2 and C3 co-denote but argue that since C3 and C4 arguably have different propositional content (similarly with C1 and C2), they do not co-denote and so Church's slingshot fails.

Donald Davidson employs slingshot-style arguments throughout his career, directed at multiple targets, but *always* employed as a reductio.[89] Where Church and Frege were happy with the conclusion that all true sentences co-designate, Davidson thinks it *pointless* to claim that sentences as a whole designate, denote, refer, or correspond to anything at all. Davidson's slingshot, like Church's, relies on premises concerning substitution principles: how much can we change in any given sentence without altering that sentence's denotation? Consider the following three sentences, which I argue a proponent of (FC) and (TM) ought to claim correspond to the same fact:

(SJ1) Smith insulted Jones exactly once.

(SJ2) It was Smith who insulted Jones exactly one time.

(SJ3) Jones was insulted by Smith exactly once.

Presumably, if (SJ1), (SJ2) and (SJ3) correspond to *any* facts, they correspond to the *same* fact; the same individuals appear in each of the three sentences playing the same roles. Further, if any of the sentences are true then all are true, and presumably this is the case because they are made true by the same thing (exactly one instance of insulting of Jones by Smith). It would be odd indeed to say that (SJ1) and (SJ2) corresponded to different facts; facts would then appear to be (as Strawson charged against Austin's correspondence theory) 'shadows of true propositions'. Since a combination of (FC) and (TM) ought to lead one to the conclusion that (SJ1), (SJ2), and

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[89] Davidson ("Truth and Meaning", 1967) argues that if sentences refer to their meanings, then all true sentences co-designate (there is but one meaning), while elsewhere Davidson ("True to the Facts", 1969) argues that if true sentences correspond to facts, there is but one fact. Finally, Davidson ("The Individuation of Events", 1969) argues that given certain conceptions of events (those that take events to be the referents of true sentences), there is but one event. All are collapsing arguments that take the form I'll be elaborating on.

(SJ3) all correspond to the same fact, what would we have to change in order for any of the

three to correspond to a different fact?

Davidson has questions such as this in mind when, in *True to the Facts*, he wonders when

different sentences might correspond to the same fact:

> When does [the statement that p corresponds to the fact that q] hold? Certainly
> when 'p' and 'q' are replaced by the same sentence; after that the difficulties set
> in. The statement that Naples is farther north than Red bluff corresponds to the
> fact that Naples is farther north than Red Bluff, but also, it would seem, to the fact
> that Red Bluff is farther south than Naples (perhaps these are the same fact). Also
> to the fact that Red Bluff is farther south than the largest Italian city within thirty
> miles of Ischia. When we reflect that Naples is the city that satisfies the following
> description: it is the largest city within thirty miles of Ischia, and such that
> London is in England, then we begin to suspect that if a statement corresponds to
> one fact, it corresponds to all.

Davidson presumably has the following statements in mind:

> (DE1) Naples is farther north than Red Bluff.
>
> (DE2) Red Bluff is farther south than Naples.
>
> (DE3) Red Bluff is farther south than the largest city within thirty miles of Ischia
> and such that London is in England.

All three are true. Now, (DE2) differs from (DE1) only in that the names 'Red Bluff' and

'Naples' have switched places, while 'farther north than' has been ditched in favor of the

complementary comparative 'farther south than' in order to preserve truth. (DE3) differs from

(DE2) only in that the name 'Naples' has been replaced by a description that uniquely describes

Naples, namely 'the largest city within thirty miles of Ischia and such that London is in

England'. This isn't a collapsing argument; (DE1)-(DE3) are introduced to set up Davidson's

slingshot, his formal argument that if sentences as a whole correspond to anything, all true sentences correspond to the same thing, which would be a case of fact fusion, and would be terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM).

Davidson's slingshot argument against (FC) and (TM) proceeds by arguing that, given plausible premises, the following four sentences would correspond to the same fact:

(D1) P

(D2) ix(x=d) = ix(x=d * P)

(D3) ix(x=d) = ix(x=d * Q)

(D4) Q

P and Q are two arbitrary unique true sentences, while 'ix(x=d)' stands for the definite description 'the unique x such that x is Diogenes', and 'ix(x=d * S) stands for 'the unique x such that x is diogenes and S'. Here are the assumed substitution principles that lead to fact fusion:

(DA1) Two true sentences which are logically equivalent correspond to the same fact.

(DA2) Two true sentences which differ only in the substitution of materially equivalent singular terms correspond to the same fact.

Populating the variables of Davidson's slingshot with actual sentences, and translating the logic into plain english make the steps in the argument easier to grasp. Consider the following:

(D1') *"Davidson was bald."*

(D2') *"The unique x such that x is Diogenes and such that Davidson was bald is identical to the unique x such that x is Diogenes."*

(D3') "The unique x such that x is Diogenes and such that Quine was bald is identical to the unique x such that x is Diogenes."

(D4') "Quine was bald."

The statements in black are true but unrelated. The statements in *italics* are logically equivalent (they are true just in case Davidson was bald). The <u>underlined</u> statements are logically equivalent (they are true just in case Quine was bald). The blue descriptions are identical (and they both describe Diogenes). The red descriptions are materially equivalent (they both describe Diogenes). The red descriptions and the blue descriptions are materially equivalent (all uniquely describe Diogenes). The green clauses are logical operators.

(D1') and (D2') are, Davidson argues, logically equivalent; they are both true in all and only the possible worlds in which 'Davidson was bald' is true. The same reasoning holds for (D3') and (D4') with respect to 'Quine was bald'. So, by (DA1), (D1') and (D2') correspond to the same fact, and (D3') and (D4') correspond to the same fact. What is needed to effect the factual collapse Davidson seeks is a principle that tells us why (D2') and (D3') correspond to the same fact. Strictly speaking, both (D2') and (D3') say of Diogenes that he is identical to Diogenes. The descriptions on either side of the identity operator in both (D2') and (D3') uniquely identify Diogenes and so are materially equivalent. Since all descriptions in (D3') and (D4') are materially equivalent, the descriptions on the right hand side of the identity operator in (D2') and (D3') are materially equivalent singular terms, and therefore (D2') and (D3') correspond to the same fact.[90] Thus, via transitivity, (D1') and (D4') correspond to the same

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[90] The move from D2 to D3 is widely misunderstood. In particular, two of the best articulations of Davidson's position seem to misconstrue Davidson's argument. Neale writes that "the assumption of co-reference in moving from [D2 to D3] … amounts to an assumption about sentences, namely that 'ix(x=d *P) = ix(x=d *Q)' is a logical consequence of '(P * Q)'. (Neale, 2001, pp 54-55). I have been arguing that this is not the way the slingshot is supposed to be conceived of as operating. The move from D2 to D3 does not depend on the assumption about logically equivalent *sentences* (which is the provenance of DA1), but rather on DA2, which is an assumption about correspondence in the face of substitution of co-referential singular terms. More on this in the section below concerning the plausibility of Davidson's substitution principles.

fact. Since P and Q, or 'Davidson is bald' and 'Quine is bald', have nothing in common save their truth values, facts fuse together and there is but one fact.

There are two ways to deny the conclusion of Davidson's slingshot: one may deny (DA1) or deny (DA2). Can this be plausibly done? Lets start with (DA1), according to which two true logically equivalent sentences correspond to the same fact. Historically, (DA1) has been the target most of Davidson's opponents zero in on.[91] If we are able to deny (DA1), we can prevent the claim that sentences in both pairs [(D1), (D2)] and [(D3), (D4)] denote the same thing, and thus we would be able to stop Davidson's slingshot before it gets off the ground: (D1) and (D2) would not co-designate.

I want to suggest that many of the supposed refutations of Davidson's slingshot that attempt to thwart his conclusion by denying (DA1) are problematic for a proponent of (FC) and (TM). Part of the problem surely lies with Davidson himself: Davidson over-deployed his slingshot, and even when Davidson did deploy his slingshot at the appropriate time, I'll argue that Gödel's slingshot is stronger: that is, Davidson might have deployed the wrong slingshot for the job. Davidson, we will remember, deployed the slingshot first (as did Church) against meanings. When Davidson's slingshot is deployed against meanings, denying (DA1) seems like the obvious first move. Logical equivalence need not preserve sameness of meaning, as (D1') and (D2') arguably differ in propositional content: (D1') is *about* Davidson, while (D2') is about Diogenes (similar comments apply to (D3') and (D4') with respect to Quine and Diogenes). Note, however, that his move is less plausible when the slingshot is deployed against truth-makers. While (D2') is arguably about something different than (D1'), it is more plausible that if

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[91] Searle takes this line of argument in *The Construction of Social Reality*, 1995, pp 221-226. Searle denies (DA2) as well, but his denial of (DA1) is more plausible.

(D1') and (D2') have truth-makers they both have the same one. So, denying (DA1) seems plausible as a response to a slingshot against *meanings*, but is less plausible as a response to a slingshot against *truth-makers* (facts). Second, Gödel's slingshot, which we'll examine shortly, delivers Davidson's collapsing conclusion with respect to truth makers without reliance on anything as strong as (DA1). So attempts to avoid the eleatic conclusion with respect to truth-makers by denying (DA1) ultimately fail.[92]

One might also deny (DA2). Denying (DA2) would thwart Davidson's argument by denying that (D2') and (D3') correspond to the same fact. Remember that (D2') and (D3') both say of Diogenes that he was self-identical, and differ only in that materially equivalent descriptions of Diogenes are used on either side of the identity operator. (DA2) has less often been the target of criticism, as denying (DA1) seems like low-hanging fruit in an argument against Davidson's conclusion. As we'll see, it is something like (DA2) which a proponent of (FC) and (TM) *must* deny in order to avoid fact fusion.

3.6 Gödel's Slingshot

In 1944, Kurt Gödel contributed an article to volume five of the then-infant *Library of Living Philosophers*; the subject of the volume was Bertrand Russell. Buried near the end of Gödel's article, titled 'Russell's Mathematical Logic', is a discussion of Russell's theory of descriptions, a footnote to which contains what Julian Dodd calls 'the best slingshot money can buy.'[93] The passage from Gödel states:

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[92] This is why Searle's refutation of slingshots fails.

[93] Dodd, 2003, p 562.

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An interesting example of Russell's analysis of the fundamental logical concepts is his treatment of the definite article "the." The problem is: what do the so-called descriptive phrases (i.e., phrases as, e.g., "the author of Waverley" or "the king of England") denote or signify and what is the meaning of sentences is which they occur. The apparently obvious answer that, e.g., "the author of Waverley" signifies Walter Scott, leads to unexpected difficulties. For if we admit the further apparently obvious axiom, that the signification of a complex expression, containing constituents which have themselves a signification, depends only on the signification of these constituents (not on the manner in which this signification is expressed), then it follows that the sentence "Scott is the author of Waverley" signifies the same thing as "Scott is Scott;" and this again leads almost inevitably to the conclusion that all true sentences have the same signification (as well as all the false ones).[94]

A brief footnote to this passage details the argument and the assumptions driving Gödel's slingshot:

The only further assumptions one would need in order to obtain a rigorous proof would be: 1) that "$\Phi(a)$" and the proposition "a is the object which has the property Φ and is identical with a" mean the same thing and 2) that every proposition "speaks about something," i.e., can be brought to the form $\Phi(a)$.

We may more clearly and formally state the assumptions which drive Gödel's slingshot against facts the following way:

(GA1) "Φa" and the truth-bearer "a is the object which has the property Φ and is identical to a", if true, correspond to the same fact (note that this is weaker than logical equivalence).

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[94] Gödel, in Schlipp, ed., 1989, pp 128-129. It is interesting that both Gödel and Church formulated their slingshots within a year of each other; indeed, it is an open question whether either Church or Gödel had read each other's paper, and who can claim priority. Regardless of priority, Gödel's slingshot remains the most powerful.

(GA2) All sentences that correspond to a fact can be put in predicate-argument form.

(GA3) Principle of composition: the fact corresponding to a composite expression containing constituents which themselves have a signification depends only on the signification of those constituents (not on the manner in which this signification is expressed). This allows correspondence-maintaining substitution between co-signifying descriptions, and between names and descriptions which uniquely describe the object, event, or person named.[95]

Gödel himself doesn't bother to walk us through the argument his footnote suggests, but Stephen Neale has done the dirty work for us in a series of articles culminating in his book *Facing Facts*. According to Neale, Gödel's argument concerns the following seven propositions, with the stipulation that they are all true:

(G1) Fa

(G2) a ≠ b

(G3) Gb

(G4) a = ix (x = a & Fx)

(G5) a = ix (x = a & x ≠ b)

(G6) b = ix (x = b & Gx)

(G7) b = ix (x = b & x ≠ a)

---

[95] Neale, 2001 pp 130-131. I have altered the assumptions so that they deal specifically with factual correspondence, and not with any arbitrary sentential extension. This strengthens, not weakens, the Slingshot as presented by Neale. As I later argue, Gödel's slingshot is terminal to a correspondence theory of truth, but not to the claim that sentences can have extensions. My claim is that if sentences have extensions, the extensions cannot serve as truth-makers.

Populated with normal english, these may be read as:

(G1') *Davidson is bald*.

(G2') **Davidson is not Quine**.

(G3') <u>Quine is bald</u>.

(G4') *Davidson is* *the unique x such that x is Davidson and x is bald*.

(G5') **Davidson is** **the unique x such that x is Davidson and x is not Quine**.

(G6') <u>**Quine is**</u> <u>**the unique x such that x is Quine and x is bald**</u>.

(G7') Quine is the unique x such that x is Quine and x is not Davidson.

Gödel's assumptions entail the conclusion that if *any* of (G1) - (G3) have *a* truth-maker, then

(G1) - (G3) all have the *same* truth-maker. Since (G1) and (G3) are arbitrary true sentences, if

Gödel's conclusion obtains then we have a case of fact fusion.

The reasoning behind Gödel's slingshot works as follows. The assumptions guarantee the

following: The statements in *italics* correspond to the same fact. The statements in **bold**

correspond to the same fact. The statements that are <u>underlined</u> correspond to the same fact.

The statements with red descriptions correspond to the same fact, and the statements with blue

descriptions correspond to the same fact. Thus there is but one fact. This bears spelling out in

precise detail.

Formally, the reasoning goes as follows. Stipulating that (G1), (G2) and (G3) are all true,

let (G1), (G2) and (G3) correspond to facts f1, f2 and f3 respectively. By (GA1), since (G1)

corresponds to f1, so does (G4). Looking at (G1') and (G4') illustrates why this is so: both (G1')

and (G4') arguably correspond to the same fact; after all, Davidson is bald. By (GA1), since

(G2) corresponds to f2, so does (G5). Looking at (G2') and (G5') illustrates why this is so: both

(G2') and (G5') arguably correspond to the same fact; after all, Davidson is not Quine.

By (GA3), since the descriptions on the right hand side of the identity operator in (G4) and (G5) are both descriptions of the form ix(Φ), and both stand for the same thing (namely a), those descriptions may be substituted for one another without changing the fact the sentence those descriptions are embedded in correspond to. (G4) and (G5) therefore both correspond to the same fact. Looking at (G4') and (G5') we can see this clearly. The descriptions in red uniquely identify Davidson, and so may be substituted for one another without changing the fact that the sentences in which the red descriptions are embedded correspond to. Thus, (G4') and (G5') both correspond to the same fact. After all, Davidson is Davidson. Since (G1) and (G4) correspond to f1, (G2) and (G5) correspond to f2, and since (G4) and (G5) correspond to the *same* fact, f1=f2.

By (GA1), since (G3) corresponds to f3, so does (G6). Looking at (G3') and (G6') illustrates why this is so: Quine is bald. By (GA1), since (G2) corresponds to f2, so does (G7). By (GA3), since (G6) and (G7) both contain descriptions of the form ix(Φ), and both descriptions uniquely identify the same thing (namely b), those descriptions may be substituted for one another without changing the fact the sentence those descriptions are embedded in correspond to. (G6) and (G7) therefore correspond to the same fact. Looking at (G6') and (G7') makes this clear; in both (G6') and (G7'), the blue descriptions uniquely identify Quine, and so may be substituted for each other without changing the fact that the sentences containing the descriptions correspond to. Thus, (G6') and (G7') correspond to the same fact. After all, Quine is Quine. Since (G2) and (G7) both correspond to f2, and since (G3) and (G6) both correspond to f3, and since (G6) and (G7) both correspond to the same fact, f2=f3. Last paragraph we established that f1=f2. Since f1 = f2, and f2 = f3, f1 = f2 = f3, and there is but one fact.

3.7 Escaping Gödel's Slingshot

Gödel's Slingshot relies on premises much less controversial than the Slingshot implicit in Frege, or the slingshots in either Church or Davidson. Accepting the premises means that facts fuse: there is but one fact, and this is terminal to the view that holds both (FC) and (TM). I want to discuss two issues. First, I'll highlight why I think Gödel's assumptions are plausible, and prima facie ought to be *hard* for a proponent of (FC) and (TM) to dismiss, even though their truth leads to fact fusion. Second, I'll examine the problematic consequences of denying either (GA1) or (GA3).[96] I'll argue that denying either premise is terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM), as it would problematically lead to fact fission. Since *accepting* Gödel's premises is terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM), and *denying* Gödel's premises is terminal to the combination of (FC) and (TM), I argue that the combination of (FC) and (TM) is, for all intents and purposes, dead.

Let us look specifically at (GA1): this principle claims that any truth-bearer of the form "Φa" and any truth-bearer "a is the object which has the property Φ and is identical to a", if true, correspond to the same fact. Remember that according to (FC) and (TM) facts are *entities*: entities which are empirical truth makers. Whatever empirical entity *makes* "Φa" true arguably *makes* "a is the object which has the property Φ and is identical to a" true as well; namely, a's Φ-ness. Both sentences share a subject (a), and predicate the same thing (Φ) of that subject. That is, if facts are truth-making entities which *exist out there in the world*, then it seems intuitive that

_____

[96] I here don't talk about denying (GA2), as it doesn't do any work in the argument as we have presented it.

"Φa" and "a is the object which has the property Φ and is identical to a", if true, share a truth maker. (GA1) seems difficult to dispute.

When we look specifically at (GA3), we find that it too seems initially plausible. (GA3), remember, is the assumption regarding compositionality which states that "the fact corresponding to a composite expression containing constituents which themselves have a signification depends only on the signification of those constituents (not on the manner in which this signification is expressed)." Names and descriptions often signify the same thing; "Tully" and "Cicero" both name the same man, and given that Tully was the greatest Roman orator, "the greatest Roman orator" and "Tully" both signify the same man; the former does so by describing Tully, the latter by naming him. "Tully" and "the orator who denounced Catiline" have the same signification. Consider the following sentences, stipulating that they are all true:

> (TC1) Tully denounced Catiline.
> (TC2) Cicero denounced Catiline.
> (TC3) The greatest Roman orator denounced Catiline.

Since, according to (TM) and (FC), facts are non-linguistic truth-making entities, I think it is intuitive that (TC1) and (TC2) correspond to the same fact - they have the same *truth-maker*. (GA3) licenses the claim that (TC1) and (TC2) correspond to the same fact, because though "Tully" and "Cicero" are different, Tully and Cicero are not . Holding (GA3), and noting that "Cicero" and "The greatest Roman orator" signify the same object, (TC3) corresponds to the same fact that (TC2) does. If facts are empirical truth-makers, if facts are part of the furniture of the external world, it seems intuitive that (TC3) corresponds to the same thing (TC2) does; co-signifying subject terms, since they signify the same external object (Cicero), ought to be prima facie substitutable while retaining the fact to which the true sentence corresponds. Since facts

are *external empirical entities* presumably composed of objects and events signified by subject terms (when such true sentences do contain such subject terms), merely picking out the *same* object in a different *way* shouldn't change the identity of the *entity* the object is a constituent *of*. Thus ends my argument for the intuition that (GA1) and (GA3) are hard to reject for the proponent of (FC) and (TM).

Suppose we instead *reject* (GA3). Since I've argued that (GA3) is prima facie plausible, what might motivate us to jettison the assumption? Stephen Neale has argued that there is a plausible interpretation of Russell under which descriptions and names, because of their different semantic functions, may *not* be substituted for each other without changing the fact that corresponds to the given true statement. Neale also claims that such a move saves facts from Gödel's slingshot. Specifically, according to Russell's theory, names refer while descriptions denote. Co-referring names may be substituted while preserving factual correspondence, but co-denoting definite descriptions cannot: call this principle (RF), and note that subscribing to (RF) means denying (GA3). Neale claims that according to Russell, "two co-denoting definite descriptions will not, in general, contribute the same (denotation-determining) properties to a fact."[97] Subscribing to this *does* disarm Gödel's slingshot. To see why, lets look at the following sentences:

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[97] Neale, 1997, p. 155.

> (TC1) Tully denounced Catiline.
>
> (TC2) Cicero denounced Catiline.
>
> (TC3) The greatest Roman orator denounced Catiline.
>
> (TC4) Tully is Cicero.
>
> (TC5) Tully is Tully.
>
> (TC6) Tully is the greatest Roman orator.
>
> (TC7) Tully is the unique x such that x is Tully.
>
> (TC8) Tully is the unique x such that x is the greatest Roman orator.

If (RF) obtains, (TC1) and (TC2) correspond to the same fact, since "Tully" and "Cicero" are both names with the same referent. However, (TC3) doesn't correspond to the same fact that (TC1) and (TC2) do, as "The greatest Roman orator", though it *denotes* Cicero, does not *refer* to Cicero. Interestingly, accepting (RF) entails that (TC4) and (TC5) refer to the same fact. Note also that accepting (RF) entails denying not only (GA3), but (GA1) as well. For if we consider (TC5) and (TC7), we can see that in (TC5) there is a name on both sides of the identity operator; in (TC7) the right side of the identity operator is populated with a definite description. Thus, (TC5) and (TC7) correspond to different facts.[98]

It is now that I want to claim that (RF) problematically entails fact fission. If (TC5), (TC7), and (TC8) all correspond to different facts, there are a problematically infinite number of facts.[99] Consider the following:

> (TC9) Tully is the unique x such that x is the _est Tully.

Clearly, (TC9) will be true when populated with any non-contradictory adjective. Thus, (TC9) may be used to generate an infinite number of unique true statements, all of which will,

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[98] Neale thinks this is tenable. See 2001, p 126, where he says "Officially Russell must say that Fa and Fix(x=a), if true, stand for distinct facts, because the former stands for a singular fact and the latter a general fact."

[99] An infinite number of facts isn't in *itself* problematic. I hope to make clear why this *particular* infinity of facts is problematic for the combination of FC and TM.

according to (RF) correspond to a unique fact. Facts here are finely grained; *too finely grained*.

I argue that (RF) does save facts from Gödel's (and any other) slingshot, but it does so with a

price: the facts we are left with *do not suffice as plausible truth-makers*. What the description on

the right hand side of (TC9) does is pick out a piece of the objective world: it picks out Tully.

Populating (TC9) with an infinite number of adjectives does not change the entity in the

objective world that the description on the right to the first identity operator picks out. The entity

that the name on the left hand side of the first identity operator picks out doesn't change when

we populate (TC9) with any arbitrary adjective. If a truth maker is supposed to be an empirical,

nonlinguistic entity that exists independently of our linguistic activity, why should it be the case

that (TC9)'s *truth maker* changes, when the *objects in the world* that the subject terms pick out

remain unchanged?

One might here hold fast to (RF), and claim that facts are simply true truth-bearers. No

one denies that (TC9) generates different truth-bearers. This is, of course, terminal to a

combination of (FC) and (TM), as the combination attempts to explain away the correspondence

relation altogether; this is the identity theory of truth. Another attempt might be to hold fast to

(RF) and to the claim that the facts are as finely grained as (RF) implies. Then, holding fast to

(TM) and (FC), we claim that (TC5) and (TC7) correspond to different facts, and thus have

different truth-makers. The problem here is that facts are mere theoretical postulates. Gonzalo

Rodriguez-Pereyra holds something like this position. Pereyra concludes his paper arguing for

the truth of (TM) with the following:

> The idea that truths have truth makers has important and problematic ontological
>
> consequences. Not only does one have to admit an extra entity, over and above

the rose, to account for what makes true that the rose is red - one has to find a truth maker, for instance, for negative existential truths, like the truth that there are no penguins in the Northern Pole. What that truth maker is, I don't claim to know. All I claim is that there must be one.[100]

Facts here sure do appear to be *theoretical postulates*. Why does Pereyra know that there is a fact that corresponds to 'there are no penguins in the Northern Pole'? He knows it because he knows that 'there are no penguins in the Northern Pole' is true. It should be clear that theoretical postulates cannot suffice as empirical truth makers.[101] Basing a correspondence theory on a conception of facts under which facts are mere theoretical postulates seems to employ, in Russell's famous phrase, 'the advantages of theft over honest toil.' We merely postulate entities which are supposed to ground truths. And if this is the case, then we only know that any true sentence corresponds to a fact *because we know that the sentence is true*, which gets the (supposed) explanatory relation exactly backwards.[102] Thus I argue that such a finely grained conception of facts is terminal to (FC) and (TM).

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[100] Rodriguez-Pereyra, in Beebee and Dodd, 2005, p. 31.

[101] Interestingly, if we were committed to the idea that true sentences corresponded to truth-makers, and that truth-makers were merely postulated entities, Occam's razor would require of us that we not multiply those entities unnecessarily. This is exactly the position of Frege and Church, who postulated only two such entities, the True and the False.

[102] Some are perfectly happy with such an account. Samuel Wheeler III (2013) has recently put forward an account of facts along exactly these lines. In earlier work I argued that "If facts are individuated by truths, they cannot serve as truthmakers; the situation is rather more like truths serving as fact makers, which is … terminal for the correspondence theory of truth." Clarke, 2014, p 73. On Wheeler's account of facts, "Facts construed in this way are not referents of sentences and they are not truth-makers. Rather, truths make them." Wheeler, 2013, p 132. Note that Wheeler *agrees* with my assessment, but is willing to abandon (TM) and (FC). I'd also note that I think Wheeler's position is a coherent one, but given that he deprives facts of their role as truthmakers, there is little philosophical work for them to *do*.

3.8 (FC) and (TM): A Toxic Combination

I have argued in this chapter that we must abandon a version of the correspondence theory that holds (FC) and (TM). I have hoped to show that a slingshot type argument in Gödel's model spells trouble for any attempt to define truth as correspondence to a fact. For if Gödel's assumptions hold, then there is *fact fusion*: there is but one fact, and then the correspondence theory is explanatorily useless, circular, or both. If we deny Gödel's assumptions, then *fact fission* occurs: facts are here unfit to serve as truth-makers. Since accepting Gödel's assumptions is terminal to (FC) and (TM) and denying Gödel's assumptions is terminal to (FC) and (TM), I argue that we ought to jettison (FC) and (TM). Neale ends his splendid book *Facing Facts*, from which my construction of Gödel's slingshot was taken, with the following passage:

> The task for the fact-theorist is clear: provide a logic of [Factual Identity
> Conditions] that (i) avoids the collapse that Gödel's argument demonstrates will
> take place if [Gödel's assumptions are granted], (ii) does justice to the semi-
> ordinary, semi-philosophical idea of what facts are, and (iii) permits facts to do
> some philosophical work.[103]

I have argued that such a task is impossible.[104]

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[103] Neale, 2001, p 223.

[104] Meg Wallace, forthcoming in *Acta Analytica*, argues that we can re-weaponize Gödel's slingshot in Neale with a modified version of Kaplan's dthat demonstrative. Wallace argues that so conceived, no theory of descriptions will save Neale from the collapsing conclusion of the slingshot. I want to note a couple of hesitations. First, Wallace doesn't notice that fact *fission* is problematic, and so notes that Neale's strategy saves fact from fusion without realizing the problems this poses for TM and FC (indeed, in this she is not alone; this is the position that Neale himself takes). The second thing I'd note is that Wallace is unclear about what the target of her new slingshot is: this she is explicit about. She explicitly argues for the truth of the following conditional: if Neale's original slingshot is potentially problematic but amenable to being defused, then her new slingshot is equally problematic but not amenable to being defused. Thus, she sometimes elides between the slingshot targeting TM and FC, and the slingshot as directed against modal claims. She claims to be agnostic as to whether the slingshot is in fact problematic; she just explicitly argues that a slingshot can be constructed which Neale can't defuse. The claim of this chapter is that slingshots *are* problematic, particularly to FC and TM; I spent considerable time showing why they are problematic, and I argued that Neale's solution will not save FC and TM, *even for his slingshot,* as his proposed solution results in fact fission.

Chapter 4

The Primitive Thesis: A Positive Proposal

4.1 Overview

According to Davidson, TRUTH is primitive: it is a concept which resists analysis, where analysis is an explanatory reduction of a complex concept into simpler, more basic concepts. This chapter will pursue the following strategy: First, I'll articulate Davidson's position with regard to the concept TRUTH. Then, I'll argue that the concept of truth plays an essential role in our mental and linguistic activity, one that cannot be eliminated or explained away; here I'll emphasize the role the concept of truth plays in a Davidsonian theory of meaning, triangulation, and radical interpretation. Finally, I'll look at some implications of Davidson's view, and address some criticisms from John Campbell that I think are in need of elaboration and correction.

4.2 Davidson, Truth, and Primitivity

Davidson spoke of primitivity throughout his career, so it is useful to remember exactly what Davidson means when he asserts that a given concept is primitive:

> I think of a concept as irreducible [primitive] if it cannot be defined in terms that are as general as the concept to be reduced, at least as clear, and that do not lead in a circle. With respect to the concepts I have listed [the good, truth, belief, knowledge, physical object, cause, and event] I think the search for such a definition or analysis is doomed.[105]

_____

[105] Davidson, 1998, "The Irreducibility of the Concept of the Self", In *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* , p 85.

This account of primitivity squares with Moore's account of primitivity that we discussed in

Chapter One (and includes the very concept which Moore was concerned with: the good).

Elsewhere Davidson elaborates:

> It is a mistake to look for an explicit definition or outright reduction of the
> concept of truth. Truth is one of the clearest and most basic concepts we have, so
> it is fruitless to dream of eliminating it in favor of something simpler or more
> fundamental.[106]

Finally:

> For the most part, the concepts philosophers single out for attention, like truth,
> knowledge, belief, action, cause, the good and the right, are the most elementary
> concepts we have, concepts without which (I am inclined to say) we would have
> no concepts at all…Truth is, as G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Frege
> maintained, and Tarski proved, an indefinable concept. This does not mean we
> can say nothing revealing about it: we can, by relating it to other concepts like
> belief, desire, cause and action. Nor does the indefinability of truth imply that the
> concept is mysterious, ambiguous, or untrustworthy.[107]

So, to be clear, to claim that TRUTH is primitive is to claim that TRUTH resists reductive

analysis. This is not to say that truth is mysterious, problematic, nonexistent, relative, or

ineffable. The concept of truth is patently clear. TRUTH is conceptual bedrock.

This view is not unique to Davidson. As we have seen in chapters one and two,

something similar to this view was present in Frege, and at times in Russell and Moore. Similar

claims are currently promoted by Asay, Merricks, and Sosa.[108] All three authors argue, however,

that the primitivity of TRUTH is compatible with some version(s) of the correspondence theory

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[106] Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, p 55.

[107] Davidson, 1996, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth". In *Truth, Language, and History*, p 21.

[108] Asay, 2013; Merricks, 2007; and Sosa, in Lynch (ed) 2001, respectively.

with regard to some classes of statements.[109] Davidson combines conceptual primitivity with a particular positive role for TRUTH to play in interpretation and linguistic activity generally. It is to that positive role that TRUTH plays that I now turn.

4.3 Davidson's Positive Program

To begin to understand the role that TRUTH plays in Davidson's overall picture, it is important to note that an important part of that overall picture is the contention that there can be no more to meaning than what could be learned in a situation of radical interpretation. Here we can most clearly see Davidson's debt to Quine. Davidson describes reading *Word and Object* as a Saul on the road to Damascus moment:

> When I finally began to get the central idea, I was immensely impressed; it changed my life. What I had found so hard to take in was the idea that there could be no more to meaning than could be learned by being exposed to the linguistic behavior of the speakers… But what struck me had not really struck me before: when we learn or discover what words mean, the process of learning is bestowing on words whatever meaning they have for the learner… What the teacher may think of as a matter of bringing the learner into step with society is, from the learner's point of view, giving the word what meaning it has. The appreciation of this point, and of it's consequences, constitutes the biggest forward step in our understanding of language since the onset of the "linguistic turn".[110]

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[109] For instance, Asay defers to Neale's interpretation of the slingshot (and thus thinks that his primitive thesis is compatible with a kind of factual correspondence theory concerning the property *truth*). Sosa argues that primitivity is compatible with correspondence. Finally, Merricks argues against (TM) by arguing that while correspondence makes sense for certain empirical statements, true negative existential statements and hypothetical conditionals are terminal for (TM). I have argued in the previous chapter that such approaches yield too much ground to a correspondence theorist, and that one cannot make sense of the correspondence theory, period.

[110] Davidson, 1999, in Hahn ed. p. 41.

The passage just quoted will serve as a keystone in the discussion in this and the following chapter. It is from Quine that Davidson adopts the strictly second-person approach to a theory of meaning. Davidson builds on Quine's approach, utilizing Tarski's method for giving the extension of the truth predicate for certain well-behaved formal languages, and Ramsey's work on probability and decision theory.

Davidson reverses the traditional or intuitive roles of truth and meaning. One might think, for any sentence S of language L, that we use the meaning to solve for truth. That is, we first ascertain what S *means*, and then determine whether or not S is *true*. Davidson turns this picture on its head, arguing that the path to meaning goes through truth. If we are in search of a theory of meaning for a language L, we should rest content with an acceptable Tarskian-style theory of truth for L in a metalanguage which we (the interpreter) understand.

What we really want, Davidson thinks, is a theory that enables us to understand each other, to correctly interpret the utterances of each other. If we had a learnable theory for a language L that enabled us to understand (correctly interpret) the sentences of that language, that would be sufficient for a theory of meaning for that language. Davidson thinks a theory of truth similar to the one that Tarski provides is just such a type of theory. Davidson's version of Tarski's theory of truth is relativized to a language (and eventually a speaker and a time), and is actually an *enumerative* definition of truth for that language, of the form 'S is true in L iff P,' where S is a statement in the language L, and P is a statement in a metalanguage. Once we have such a theory of truth for that language, we may be said to understand that language:

> There is no need to suppress, of course , the obvious connection between a
> definition of truth of the kind Tarski has shown how to construct, and the concept

of meaning. It is this: the definition works by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To know the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence - any sentence - to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language.[111]

If you know truth conditions for a sentence, the argument goes, then you thereby understand that sentence - you know when it is true.[112] Knowing the truth conditions for every sentence (which is what a fully enumerative truth definition for a language L would do) would suffice for understanding every sentence of that language, because you would know the conditions under which such a sentence would be true, and you would therefore have an accurate theory of meaning for a language L.

This can be seen as the first premise in a *modus ponens* argument: if you had a truth theory (in the form of a Tarski truth definition) for a language L, you would thereby have a theory of *meaning* for language L. However, to actually get at meaning we need to supply the second premise of such an argument: we need to show that we have a correct Tarskian style truth theory for L, or at least that it is in principle possible to acquire one. Davidson's trio of articles, "Truth and Meaning", "Radical Interpretation", and "A Unified Theory of Thought, Meaning, and Action" can be seen to supply both premises of the argument. In "Truth and Meaning" Davidson argues that a (correct) truth theory for a language is sufficient to generate understanding or meaning, while "Radical Interpretation" coupled with "A Unified Theory"

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[111] Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p 24

[112] Of course, Davidson insisted, the form such truth theories must take is a Tarski-style truth theory amended so as to be law-like.

supply an attempt to show how one may acquire such a truth theory even under the most unfavorable circumstances: when we are *completely* ignorant of the meaning of the language that another is speaking.

4.4 Truth and Triangulation

What we would do in a position to radically interpret another speaker (interpret a speaker of a language we are ignorant of), Davidson thinks, is go about constructing a Tarski style truth theory for his language:

> A good place to begin is with the attitude of holding a sentence true, of accepting it as true. This is, of course, a belief, but it is a single attitude applicable to all sentences, and so does not ask us to be able to make finely discriminated distinctions among beliefs. It is an attitude an interpreter may plausibly be taken to be able to identify before he can interpret, since he may know that a person intends to express a truth in uttering a sentence without having any idea what truth.[113]

The idea is that even if we don't initially speak a language, we can still observe when an agent makes an assertion, that is, when the subject holds an utterance true. To see how this works, Davidson gives the following example:

> (T) 'Es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t....
> (E) Kurt belongs to the German speech community and Kurt holds true 'Es regnet' on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon.[114]

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[113] Davidson, 1973, "Radical Interpretation", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p 135.

[114] Ibid, p 135.

Davidson thinks that (E) is the kind of publicly available evidence that an interpreter would have access to, and counts as evidence for (T) as a theorem in a correct Tarski-style truth theory for Kurt's language (German), and (T) is sufficient for understanding 'Es regnet'.

What we *must* do, in radical interpretation, is impose our logic and beliefs on the subject we wish to interpret. There is no choice but to *assume*, at first blush, that the subject of an interpretation has massively true beliefs. This is the picture we get from Quine in *Word and Object*. We observe a rabbit run by, we observe a subject observe the rabbit, and we observe the subject subsequently utter 'Gavagai'. We interpret the utterance as 'Lo, a rabbit', 'There goes a rabbit' or perhaps 'That's a rabbit'. Note that at this stage, attribution of error doesn't make sense. The field linguist must interpret the subject as 'getting it right'. It simply wouldn't make sense to interpret the subject as meaning 'that's a porcupine' *and being wrong;* at least not this *early* in the interpretive story. In order to plausibly attribute a mistaken classification of an object to subject, we must first understand what the subject's sentences *normally* mean, and at this stage the only evidence for *what* a subject normally means *just is* the linguistic performance of uttering 'gavagai'. This is a stage of interpretation that *must* be prior to doubt.

This observational triangle of speaker, interpreter, and objects and events in a shared external world, is essential to Davidson's later thought, and grounds a particular form of externalism with regard to mental content that is unique to Davidson's thought, but shares elements with the externalism of Tyler Burge and Hilary Putnam.[115] That the triangulating situation is central to his project is evident in a reply to an essay by Pascal Engel:

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[115] Davidson's externalism differs from Putnam's in that Davidson's externalism generalizes more broadly than simply to natural kinds, and from Burge's in that Burge's account of social externalism entails that a speaker may be wrong more often than Davidson thinks is plausible. For more on this, see Davidson's "Knowing One's Own Mind" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*.

It seems to me that the basic justification for holding empirical sentences true is given by the conditions under which we observe them to be held true. When we have succeeded in matching up a speaker's observation sentences with our own, we have discovered what justifies the speaker in holding them true. Of course, such matching is not to be trusted simply on the basis of a few successes; logically connected sentences must come out right, and so must explanations of error. The interpretation of any sentence depends on placing it in a network of other sentences. But the network must be tied to the world through that kind of triangulation that is fundamental to radical interpretation.[116]

Note that this qualifies which claims we take as evidence; the qualification is holistic, interpretive, and takes the form of the principle of charity. Our provisional theorem of our truth theory for the subject in question, of the form "'Gavagai' is true if uttered by X in L iff that is a rabbit" may be altered when we observe the same subject uttering 'Gavagai' in the presence of *any* animal. If we observe a subject uttering P in one circumstance and ~P later, we *assume* (before we try to interpret P) that the subject *isn't* irrational, and therefore that P must be context-sensitive. The qualifications we apply map the subject's utterances onto our own beliefs.

Thus, if we succeed in radical interpretation, we necessarily end up interpreting the subject as being mostly in agreement with us; since *our* beliefs are just those that *we hold true,* we necessarily take those we interpret to be mostly *correct*. It should also be clear that for radical interpretation to get off the ground via triangulation, the interpreter and the subject need to be similar in a certain way. More accurately, both need be at least similar enough in *disposition* to respond similarly to relevant classes of distal stimuli: this is why it makes sense to

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[116] Davidson, 1999, in Hahn ed. p 460.

begin radical interpretation (and to learn a first language) at the level of nearby medium sized objects.[117] Davidson elaborates:

> It is clear that for triangulation to work, the creatures involved must be very much alike. They must class together the same distal stimuli, among them each other's relations to those stimuli. In the end, it is just this double sharing of propensities that gives meaning to the idea of classing things together. We say: that creature puts lions together into a class. How do we tell? The creature reacts in relevantly similar ways to lions. What makes the responses similar? Our concepts do; we have the concepts that define these classes. It takes another creature enough like the first to see and say this.[118]

Remembering that triangulation involves two subjects observing each other react to distal stimuli, the argument for the constraint that interpreter and subject be similar in disposition may be put as follows. Were the creatures not sufficiently similar in disposition, how could either creature be in a position to think that the other was reacting to a *triangulated* object? It is similarity of reaction which *fixes* the distal stimuli, and is the germ of propositional content.[119] Two creatures hide from a lion. When the situation repeats itself enough, each creature is warranted in taking the lion to be the *cause* of the other's reactions, and so when the situation

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[117] Surely two creatures reacting similarly to each other satisfy this requirement. I argue later that Davidson actually utilizes a weaker version of similarity, where the similarity is not between the two creature's simultaneous reaction, but rather a similarity of individual reactions to the same repeated distal stimuli. This weaker version of similarity means that the creatures don't need to share anything like a basic vocabulary; their reactions don't have to be similar to each other, they merely have to notice that they react in a consistent, that is, in a self-similar manner, in circumstances that the interpreter has a self-similar reaction to.

[118] Davidson, 2001, "What Thought Requires" in *Problems of Rationality*, p 143.

[119] This germ isn't *sufficient* for propositional content; animals other than humans hide from lions. While I don't yet argue that such animals don't have propositional thought (though I do believe that they do not), I certainly don't want to imply at this point that such animals *do* possess propositional thought.

later arises where one creature observes another creature hiding, they may take it as an indication

that there is a lion present and hide, without having themselves seen a lion.[120]

Triangulation is essential in fixing the location of distal stimuli, and triangulation requires

multiple points of view (at least two). Here is Davidson explaining triangulation at the most

basic level:

> It takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of a thought, and thus to
> define its content. We may think of it as a form of triangulation: each of two
> people is reacting differently to sensory stimulus streaming in from a certain
> direction. Projecting the incoming lines outward, the common cause is at their
> intersection. If the two people now note each other's reactions (in the case of
> verbal reactions), each can correlate these observed reactions with his or her
> stimuli from the world. A common cause has been determined. The triangle
> which gives content to the thought and speech is complete. But it takes two to
> triangulate.[121]

What this makes clear is that triangulation is what *fixes* the distal stimulus, and since Davidson's

position is a form of semantic externalism, by fixing the stimulus the triangulation also fixes the

meaning of any reaction, *if* that reaction can be said to be *propositional*. We are now in a

position to ask when a reaction can be deemed *evidence* of thought or meaning, and hence

propositional.

4.5 Truth, Error, and the Nature of Belief

I turn now to belief *attribution*: up to this point we have been concerned with

triangulation as a method of interpretation, of matching up our sentences with a subject's

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[120] Davidson, 2001, "What Thought Requires" in *Problems of Rationality*, pp 141-142.

[121] Davidson, 1991, "Three Varieties of Knowledge" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, 2001 pp 212-213.

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behavior. Thus I have primarily been concerned with belief *individuation*. Our interpreter must match (individuated) sentences the interpreter believes he knows with those of a subject, and one does this by triangulating with the subject with regard to distal stimuli. However, humans are not the only animals that triangulate with each other, nor are humans the only kind of thing we can observe reacting to distal stimuli. Certain trees change their growth patterns when exposed to light of a certain wavelength; this indicates that similar trees are present and so the tree's root system receives more nutrients. We may colloquially say that the tree thinks there are similar trees nearby and so decides to do root work rather than canopy work; it is counter intuitive to take the attribution of *belief* literally, as the claim that the tree really does have beliefs (and, apparently, the relevant desires necessary to motivate goal-directed behavior with regard to those beliefs). Intuitively, we want to say that most adult humans think, while trees, thermostats, and sunflowers do not. Yet sunflowers, trees, and thermostats reliably respond in predictable ways to distal stimuli, while other animals, such as schools of fish, seem to be capable of triangulation (they respond to each other's responses to distal stimuli). When can we credit an entity with thought?

Davidson denies that any entity that lacks the concept of objective truth properly *thinks*.[122] Thus, the possession of the concept of truth is necessary for thought generally:

> A creature does not have the concept of a cat merely because it can discriminate cats from other things in its environment. Mice are very good at telling cats apart from trees, lions, and snakes. But being able to discriminate cats is not the same thing as having the concept of a cat. You have the concept of a cat only if you can

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[122] This *doesn't* commit one to the thesis that non-linguistic animals are automata, unconscious, or don't experience mental events (like pain); those events are just not propositional thought, and thought is propositional in *nature*.

make sense of the idea of *misapplying* the concept, of believing or judging that something is a cat which is not a cat.[123]

It is only with knowledge that one may be misapplying a concept that one can be counted as possessing that concept. But to know that a concept may be misapplied is already to possess not just that concept, but the concept of truth, and of error:

> To apply a concept is to make a judgement... and this requires the application of the concept of truth, since it is always possible to classify or characterize something wrongly. To have a concept, in the sense I am giving this word, is, then, to be able to entertain propositional contents: a creature has a concept only if it is able to employ that concept in the context of a judgement.[124]

And later, in the same essay, Davidson elaborates on the thesis that TRUTH is our most fundamental concept:

> There is no more central concept than that of truth, since having any concept requires that we know what it would be for that concept to apply to something - to apply truly, of course. The same holds for the concept of truth itself. To have the concept of truth is to have the concept of objectivity, the notion of a proposition being true or false independent of one's beliefs or interests. In particular, then, someone who has a belief, who holds some proposition to be true or false, knows that that belief may be true or false. In order to be right or wrong, one must know that it is possible to be right or wrong.[125]

So according to this position, the possession of the concept of truth is both necessary and sufficient for thought, and the concept of truth brings with it other central concepts like belief and objectivity. To possess the concept truth one needs to understand what it is for that concept

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[123] Davidson, 1997, "The Emergence of Thought" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, p 124.

[124] Davidson, 1995, "The Problem of Objectivity" in *Problems of Rationality* p 10.

[125] Davidson, 1995, "The Problem of Objectivity" in *Problems of Rationality*, p 10.

(TRUTH) to correctly apply to a thing (a belief): this requires an understanding that merely having a belief is different from having a *correct* belief, we want our beliefs to correspond to the objective world.[126]

Two questions remain; the first relates to Davidson's criterion for thought, and pertains to *when* we ought to attribute thought to a potential subject, the second concerns the *source* of the concept of truth. Turning to the first question: what counts as evidence of possession of the concept of truth? The answer is an awareness that one's classification may be incorrect. One cannot possess the concept of truth without knowing that any particular classification might be incorrect. This is not to say the subject commands the word 'true'. Rather, this only means that the subject is aware of the possibility of error with regard to the subject's own classifications.

Surely possession of the concept of truth is *sufficient* for thought. Many balk at the claim that it is *necessary*; this conception denies that dogs, dolphins, and even infants think. I think the restriction is less worrisome than one might think. Anything other than predicative propositional structure combined with evidence of awareness of the possibility of error is going to be a problematically *broad* definition of thought, one that will arguably attribute thought to sunflowers (who track the sun), and earthworms who can reliably distinguish between moist and dry soil (in the sense of reliably finding moist soil). The complaint against the claim that possession of the concept of truth is *necessary* for thought must be that the restriction is too

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[126] Here a correspondence theorist might employ talk of facts. Note that the option is not open to me, as I have argued in the last chapter that the factual correspondence theory of truth is unworkable. However, remember that what was problematic about such a theory was that truth-makers are subject to fusion or fission. Supposing that truth makers fuse, there then is nothing wrong with saying that true beliefs correspond to the (objective) world, provided we don't try to individuate truth-makers in a more finely grained manner. This talk of correspondence is, I argue, innocent, precisely because *it is* circular in exactly the way that dooms a factual correspondence theory of truth. There is but one thing to which true things correspond, which may be called the world, the true, the great fact, etc. This simply reiterates that our beliefs answer to reality, that truth is objective.

narrow. While it *is* narrow, it isn't, I claim, *problematically* narrow. It is merely a constraint on interpretation.[127]

What counts as evidence that one possesses the concept of error? Marcia Cavell has done more than anyone else to square Davidson's theory of radical interpretation with the results of empirical child psychology.[128] In *Becoming a Subject*, Cavell gives roughly three stages of child development. In the first stage, a babbling child and an adult share interest in an apple, and the child makes a sound enough like 'apple' to warrant the reward of more attention or praise. In this stage, Cavell notes that the child is no different than a trained dog.[129] The second stage arrives when the child is capable of differentiating between reality and make-believe, usually around age 2-3. The third stage is when a child, around age 4-5, is fully capable of understanding false belief and attributing false beliefs to others of the form 'they thought x but were wrong'.[130]   Clearly a child at stage 3 is thinking, and clearly a child at stage 1 is triangulating. The child at stage 2 is capable of differentiating between objectivity and fantasy,

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[127] The situation seems parallel (in my mind) to certain debates concerning wrongness of killing and abortion. Don Marquis argues convincingly that the question of the moral permissibility of abortion is subordinate to the question of when it is morally permissible to kill generally. It is only when we have a general theory of the wrongness of killing that we then turn to abortion and see whether it fits the bill as a permissible killing. Marquis argues that most defenses of abortion end up endorsing rules concerning the permission to kill that are overly permissive (such that they would permit killing infants, or even us). Marquis starts with the claim that it is wrong to kill *us*, and then formulates a theory concerning the wrongness of killing that he thinks explains *why* it is wrong to kill us. Applying this theory of the wrongness of killing to the case of abortion, he concludes that most cases of abortion are immoral for the same reason that killing us is immoral. Those who disagree with his conclusion must show that his criterion for permissible killing is *problematically* narrow. Davidson's strategy makes the parallel assumption that *we* think, and traces the implications. In both cases, denying the assumption is problematic. Two things follow from this kind of methodology: first, what counts as thought will be inextricably tied to the kind of thought that *we* have, and second, that the concept thought will not exhaust mental activity, as thought conceived in this way is *necessarily* propositional, while mental events (arguably) are not.

[128] As Davidson's widow, she was in the unique position to empirically ground Davidson's theoretical work as he was sharpening his views on triangulation. If she is right, Davidson's triangulating situation accords with contemporary research into child development.

[129] Cavell, 2006, p 66.

[130] Cavell, 2006, pp 65-68.

and so *in some sense* has the concept of truth (though it is not until the third stage that they have

the word 'true'). Somewhere along the way the child has developed into what Cavell terms a

subject, and what we might as well call a thinker. Do we need to say where? The demand for

more here seems unwarranted; we may simply claim, as Davidson does, that "the abilities to

speak, perceive, and think develop together, gradually."[131]

As a caveat, the former criterion for thought is narrow, but just because the criterion for

thought is narrow, the criterion for mentality can be wider. Cavell makes the point well:

> The implication is not that before the infant has propositional thoughts and
> intentional states, nothing at all is going on in her head, *though it is hard to say
> what is*. At the very least infants have feelings, emotion, sensations, purposes,
> instincts; they communicate, perceive, and learn.[132]

It should be clear that the narrow conception of thought doesn't prevent us from ascribing

consciousness or other mental capabilities to infants or some animals, capabilities that arguably

place constraints on what we can ethically do to them.

There remains the question concerning the source of the concept of truth. Davidson

argues that the triangular situation is the *only* possible source of our conception of the possibility

of error, and hence of our concept of truth. Thus, the social triangle is necessary not only for

fixing the distal stimulus of any common reaction, but also for the concept of truth generally.

The argument is peppered throughout Davidson's writings, usually casually as an off-hand

argument that Tyler Burge's version of social externalism is incorrect, or at least woefully

incomplete. Burge argues that the content of a perceptual belief is the normal cause of that

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[131] Davidson, 1997, "Seeing Through Language" in *Truth, Language and History* p 141.

[132] Cavell, 2006, p 70. Italics added.

belief. This is problematic; for there are simply too many candidates for the 'normal cause'. Say

the belief is Bob's, and is the belief 'that's a cow'. Possible candidates include the cow, the

photons hitting Bob's eye, the neural firings in Bob's brain, or, to drive the problem in the other

direction, the Big Bang. The attention of a second person with similar dispositions provides the

other perspective to fix the distal stimulus: the cow.[133] Once the distal stimulus is fixed, we can

describe situations where a distal stimulus provokes divergent responses. Of course, this can

only happen when there has been a background of similar responses. When the same distal

stimulus provokes divergent responses, there exists a possibility of the emergence of the concept

of error:

> If you and I can each correlate the other's responses with the occurrence of a
> shared stimulus, however, an entirely new element is introduced. Once the
> correlation is established it provides each of us with a ground for distinguishing
> the cases in which it fails. Failed natural inductions can now be taken as revealing
> a difference between getting it right and getting it wrong, going on as before, or
> deviating, having a grasp of the concepts of truth and falsity. A grasp of the
> concept of truth, of the distinction between thinking something is so and its being
> so, depends on the norm that can be provided only by interpersonal
> communication; and of course interpersonal communication, and indeed, the
> possession of any propositional attitude, depends on a grasp of the concept of
> objective truth.[134]

It might seem like Davidson is arguing in a circle here, as communication requires the concept of

truth, and the concept of truth requires communication; the point is that they must develop

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[133] Gavagai type problems might be raised here, but they are less problematic than the proximal vs. distal stimulus problem that an untriangulated individual faces; they merely illustrate the point that both Quine and Davidson accept, that there is no such thing as 'the' correct interpretation/translation manual; this is an acceptable indeterminacy.

[134] Davidson, 1994, "The Social Aspect of Language" in *Truth, Language and History,* p 124.

together. To make sense of this claim, I think we need to move very slowly through the steps of Davidson's argument, as he sometimes blithely elides between the historical emergence of thought and the concept of truth, the emergence of the concept in individuals in a culture, and radical interpretation of another linguistically equipped creature.

First, why must the second person exist to ground our concept of truth? Why wouldn't something like *surprise* be enough? The answer is that to be surprised *is to have expectations not met*; but, since expectations take the form of beliefs, and to have a belief is to understand that such a belief may be false, being surprised requires that one *already* have the concept of truth.[135] What we have been trying to explain is the origin of the notion that our beliefs *answer to something,* that truth is objective while belief is personal. It is the second person who provides a 'double take' on the world, and provides a source of 'failed natural inductions' mentioned in the quote above.[136] On this account, surprise requires the concept of truth, and so cannot ground it. Divergent reactions to shared distal stimuli do not *require* the concept of truth and so *can* serve to ground it.

Now I want to turn to a specific question about the kind of similarity (and hence divergence) that successful triangulation requires. So far we have been using examples in which

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[135] Lepore and Ludwig, 2005, in their interpretation of Davidson's argument, make exactly the move I here dismiss as incorrect. On p 402, they claim that our *past selves* can serve as sources of the concept of error; in effect, they claim that we can *triangulate* with our past selves. We note that there is no book on the table, though we previously believed there was a book on the table. Rather than think some physical objects (books) come in and out of existence willy-nilly, we may, in the face of objective evidence (the present book) which conflicts with our past belief (that there was no book on the table), think that our past belief was *false.* This kind of situation, Lepore and Ludwig maintain, can be the source of the concept of error. Note that this implies that the subject acquires the belief that there *is* an external world filled with physical objects that endure through time *prior* to their acquisition of the concept of error and the idea that there are other minds. On Davidson's account, the belief in an objective world, the concept of error, and the recognition of other minds in an objective world emerge *together.* On this account, we wouldn't have the belief that external objects endured through time unless we had another mind with which to triangulate our simultaneous responses to distal stimuli.

[136] This idea is elaborated in Davidson's unpublished manuscript *The Concept of Objectivity*, some of which was given in a preliminary form in lectures in Munich in May of 1993. The manuscript, and the lecture, are held with Davidson's papers at The University of California, Berkeley.

similar creatures respond similarly, in the sense that their responses are similar to each other. It is unclear what counts as a similar response for Davidson. One might think that he has in mind two creatures simultaneously observing each other and a shared distal stimulus, and reacting similarly to each other (such as the example earlier, of hiding from a predator). Surely this is *sufficient* for triangulation. What's more, it looks like it is in line with the kind of 'skeptical solution' that Kripke draws from Wittgenstein: this looks like a *shared practice*.[137] However, Davidson's proposal is weaker, in that he doesn't think that two speakers must share a practice in anything like the specific sense that Kripke implies. For, Davidson asks, consider agents A and B, one of which utters 'cow' and the other 'vache' in response to cows. Couldn't such subjects come to understand each other, though they don't share, in practice, similar responses? Their responses are self-similar, and since they *don't* share a vocabulary, they don't share the kind of practice Kripke seems to argue that following a rule *requires*. However, in one relevant sense they do share a practice; responding in predictably similar ways to similar distal stimuli over time. Thus, what will count as divergent responses need not be two creatures responding in different manners ('vache' and 'cow' would then count as different), but rather responses which diverge, from the view of the interpreter, with the subject's past behavior. Since radical interpretation seems *possible*, the most we ought to say is that the practice that radically interpreting subjects share is simply the practice of *interpretation*, and as we have seen, this involves assuming that the subjects are in the main *in agreement* and *correct* about the world and each other; they see each other as *veridical*. They possess and deem the other in possession of the concept of truth. The concept of truth, then, is central.

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[137] Kripke, 1982, pp 108-113

4.6 Implications, Complications, and Interpretation

It is important that Davidson's proposal for theories of meaning in the form of Tarski style truth definitions be combined with Davidson's later views concerning triangulation and the nature and content of belief. Early in his career, Davidson argued that reference is a theoretical relation that is subordinate to the prefers true relation. Thus when radically interpreting a subject, we postulate reference on the evidence of what the subject prefers true. Davidson has also argued that this may generate mutually exclusive theories of reference for particular languages that nonetheless have the same truth conditions, and thus that reference is inscrutable. Davidson famously uses the argument concerning Wilt and his shadow.[138] John Campbell is concerned that the conclusion Davidson accepts is 'absolutely crackers.' Though the problem traces to Quine and 'Gavagai', it is useful to spell it out in full. We can imagine a simple language consisting of two names, 'Raleigh' and 'Isaac' and two predicates '_smokes' and '_fishes' (call this language L1). One way to interpret the language (call this interpretation C1) is this: 'Raleigh' refers to Raleigh, 'Isaac' refers to Isaac, '_smokes' is true of an object x if x smokes, and '_fishes' is true of an object x if x fishes. So, 'Raleigh smokes' will be true iff Raleigh smokes, and 'Isaac fishes' will be true iff Isaac fishes. Here's the rub; another possible interpretation of the language is the following (call this interpretation C2). 'Raleigh' refers to whatever is exactly 1 mile to the East of Raleigh, and 'Isaac' refers to whatever is exactly 1 mile to the east of Isaac, and '_smokes' is true of an object x if whatever is exactly one mile to the West of x smokes, and '_fishes' is true of an object x if whatever is exactly one mile to the West

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[138] Davidson, 1979, "The Inscrutability of Reference" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* pp 230-231.

of x fishes. The two interpretations are materially equivalent.[139] Which is the correct

interpretation? According to this picture of Davidson (and Quine), neither is *the* correct one.

There will be multiple interpretations or translation manuals that yield the same set of T-

sentences, and so any will do. Since we test a theory of meaning at the level of the sentence, and

since the truth conditions of (C1) and (C2) are the same, we cannot say that either is more

plausible than the other; they test exactly the same (or so the argument goes).

     If we are to take Davidson seriously that Tarski style truth theories will do duty as

theories of meaning, must we say that it is unclear what the individual words mean, that (C2) and

(C1) are equally plausible? Here is Campbell:

> The reason for these bizarre implications of the view Davidson is recommending
> is that it is just a mistake to think that the only level at which we can discern
> norms of language-use is at the level of the whole sentence. The fundamental
> point of contact between language and the world is not between the sentence and
> the patterns of stimulation which causes assent or dissent; the fundamental point
> of contact is rather between the demonstrative and the conscious attention to the
> object which sets the standards of right and wrong for the information-processing
> that swings into play to allow you to verify or act on the basis of propositions
> about the object.[140]

This is, I think, confused. I think we can make a distinction between the kinds of E-sentences

that count as evidence for a theory, and the T-sentences that the full theory will eventually take

the form of. Remembering Kurt from earlier in the chapter, (E) counts as evidence for (T). A

full Tarski-style truth theory for a language L presumably won't make *use* of demonstratives, but

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[139] The example is Campbell's, and improves upon the Wilt's shadow example, as not everyone has a shadow, but everyone is exactly one mile east of something.

[140] Campbell, 2002, p 228.

the evidence we use to formulate the truth theory certainly *will*. Furthermore, since we can state

the kind of evidence we take for (T) sentences in terms of (E) sentences, there is a sense in which

Davidson and Campbell disagree with what is going on in cases of ostension via demonstrative.

Campbell seems to think that ostensive learning involves simply *tagging* an object with a

name, emphasizing the 'demonstrative and the conscious attention to the object' that 'sets the

standards of right and wrong' for 'propositions about the object.' Of course this is *one* way to

interpret such a practice, but it is not the *only* way. For it seems just as plausible that what we

are doing, rather than tagging an object with a name, is ascribing a name to that object via

demonstrative and description which fixes the referent of the name.[141] The question is how to

interpret "Susan" uttered by a Susan, pointing at herself, to a potential interpreter. In the case of

names, Campbell must think that the concept of truth isn't involved at all at; this 'tagging' is

what 'sets the standards of right and wrong' and thus is *prior* to employment of the concept of

truth. I want to suggest a few reasons why we shouldn't think such a view is *decisive*.[142]

First, it seems perfectly plausible to think of a Susan-type utterance as truth-functional; it

would take the form of a demonstrative and either a name or a definite description. Davidson

makes the point at the end of *Truth and Predication*, noting:

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[141] This is in partial accord with Russell's claim that the only really logically proper names are 'this' and 'that'. A key difference is that while Russell took the referents of 'this' and 'that' to be private sensations, under this conception 'this' and 'that' refer to publicly triangulated objects and events in the external world (in the basic ostensive learning example). Proposals similar to this can be seen in Quine and Burge, and are summarized and defended in Delia Graff Fara's forthcoming "Names are Predicates", *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 124, No. 1, 2015.

[142] Another problem with the Campbell account is that it seems to conflate Davidson and Quine. Davidson has always maintained that the stimulus is distal (as in, an object), and the quoted passage seems to saddle Davidson with Quine's view of proximal stimulus in the form of 'patterns of stimulation at nerve endings'. Of course, for Davidson, there *are* patterns of stimulation, but those patterns do not consist in nerve ending stimulation but in repeated responses to a shared distal stimulus, the very thing that, on Campbell's view, is supposed to be the 'object of our attention.'

> Some names are learned by direct ostentation and as if they were unaided in sentences: what may be said aloud is just a name, understood as a short sentence ('This is Peter', 'That is Paul'). Names learned in this way are guaranteed a reference. Names learned less directly can then be treated as definite descriptions.[143]

Clearly Davidson thinks that what we are doing is attaching a name to an object via conscious attention; he thinks we do this by *employing* the concept of truth in a triangulating situation. The sentence 'This is Peter' is *true* and *informative,* and *fixes* the referent of 'Peter' for the interpreter. I'll move on to consider ostensive predication for things like colors in the next chapter, but I'll tell a similar story.

Second, remember how simple (L1) is, with two names and two predicates. It's not clear that we ought to credit an entity with such a limited vocabulary with thought at all, and hence it's not clear that what we've described is actually a *language* at all. Recalling that possession of the concept of truth is, on this account, necessary and sufficient for thought and language, we may question whether (L1) is expressive enough to demonstrate knowledge of the possibility of error. Arguably, (L1) is insufficient in this regard; most modern thermostats exhibit behavior at least as complex as the behavior that (L1) allows. Consider a thermostat controlling two areas, which we may call 'upstairs' and 'downstairs', set to keep temperatures at a comfortable 72 degrees Farenheit. We may, for pragmatic reasons, describe the thermostat as possessing a language like (L1), which we may call (L2). (L2) is composed of two names and two predicates; the names are 'Upstairs', 'Downstairs', the predicates are '_needs cooling' and '_needs warming'. The thermostat may even display the phrases 'Upstairs needs cooling' 'Downstairs needs warming'.

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[143] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 162.

And we may raise the parallel question here that (C1) and (C2) raised for (L1). Do we interpret 'Upstairs' as referring to upstairs, or as the place below upstairs? Well; we could plausibly interpret 'Upstairs' as meaning whatever is below upstairs, and '_needs cooling' as true of an object x if whatever is above that object needs cooling. Again, we will hold the same sentences true in the same situations. Which does the thermostat *mean*? Well, I'd argue that since the thermostat doesn't display enough behavior for us to credit it with thought, and hence can't have beliefs or hold statements true, that the thermostat *doesn't mean anything*; it simply reacts. One can say the same thing, for the same reasons, encountering something which commands (L1). What creatures or objects that command (L1) or (L2) lack, which explains why we may exclude them from the domain of thinkers and interpreters, is the concept of truth.

"Language is the organ of propositional perception. Seeing sights and hearing sounds does not require thought with propositional content; perceiving how things are does, and this ability develops along with language."

 -Davidson[144]

Chapter 5

Truth, Predication, and Properties

5.1 Overview

I ended the last chapter by endorsing a Davidsonian version of triangulation that, through ostension, ties language directly to distal stimuli in the external world. I argued that the concept of truth was central to interpretation and to triangulation.   In this chapter I will outline Davidson's conception of predication. I'll start by framing Davidson's conception of the *problem* of predication, and I'll highlight just how Davidson thinks that the problem can be solved using Tarski's theory of truth. I then note that Davidson's conception of predication makes no use of properties or universals, and I claim that because Davidson's conception doesn't explain predication in terms of properties or universals, we can construct a plausible account of both properties and universals in terms of predication. I claim that this account of properties, coupled with the interpretive triangle I outlined in the last chapter, may be used to dissolve concerns about 'nature's joints'. What results is a form of externalism, and I examine Davidson's claim that his version of externalism and interpretation ward off the skeptic. In the

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[144] Davidson, 1997, "Seeing Through Language" in *Truth, Language, and History*, p 135.

last three sections I apply Davidson's views on predication to three important topics. First, I

apply the view of properties I outlined early in the chapter to the property *truth* itself. Second, I

connect Davidson's views on predication to certain contemporary claims that names are

predicates, and consider the possibility of collapsing the naming relation into the predication

relation. Lastly, I argue that we may collapse what I call the 'common name' relation into the

predication relation, but argue that, consistent with the experimental and philosophical work of

Zenon Pylyshyn, we still ought to keep the notion of logically proper names, restricting their

application to demonstratives.

5.2 Predication

The problem of predication, as Davidson interprets it, is simply what has elsewhere been

called the problem of the unity of the proposition. Davidson's favorite example is the simple two

word sentence 'Theaetetus sits'. The problem of the unity of the proposition is that some strings

of words can be meaningful when uttered together, in the sense that they have truth-evaluable

propositional content ('Theaetetus sits' is a prime example), while other strings of words appear

similarly meaning*less* ('Susan', 'Bill, James, The king of France', or even 'Theaetetus, the

property of sitting'). The strings I've just deemed meaningless don't have propositional unity, in

that as written (or uttered) they cannot be true or false: the first is simply a name, the second a

list of names and definite descriptions, the third a list containing a name and a definite

description of a property. Lists are not typically things that can be true or false, and *unless*

singular terms like 'Susan' are read *as abbreviated sentences*, short for 'That is Susan' , such

utterances do no linguistic work. This is the position I outlined at the end of the last chapter with

regard to interpretation of singular terms like 'Susan'.

The problem of predication is a problem of regress. The problem stems from considering

the roles that subjects and predicates are supposed to play in sentences (that is, strings of words

that *have* propositional unity, that are truth-evaluable). What is it about such sentences that

accounts for their having a truth value? Take 'Theaetetus sits', with its two parts, the

'Theaetetus' part, and the 'sits' part. We may say that the 'Theaetetus' part contributes to the

truth conditions by standing for Theaetetus. This leaves the 'sits' part. If we help ourselves to an

ontology of properties, we might say that it names a property. The sentence then denotes two

things, Theaetetus and the property of *sitting*. Problematically, the sentence looks like a

meaningless list again. We must then insist that the noun and the verb stand in a certain relation

to each other, the relation of instantiation. So the sentence now concerns three entities;

Theaetetus, the property of sitting, and the property of instantiation. Again, this looks like a list;

the entities must be related to each other in a certain way. What does the relating? Surely it will

be a relation, which now may be added to the list of objects. Bradley's regress looms.[145]

Davidson's point is that postulating the existence of properties as entities *does not solve* the

problem of the unity of the sentence; if the function predicates play is explained by postulating

that predicates have *extensions* that are *objects*, the sentence dissolves into a list.

Davidson rightly credits Frege with a major advance in the problem of predication. We

can recall from Chapter 2 that Frege thought that singular terms have objects as their

Bedeutungen, while predicates have concepts as their *Bedeutungen*. Concepts are functions.

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[145] This is a condensed form of the argument that Davidson gives on pp 85-87 of *Truth and Predication*.

Functions map objects onto other objects. Concepts are functions that map objects onto truth

values. Frege avoids the regress by declaring concepts to be incomplete: they are like functions.

Frege noted that concepts are like functions, and declared that they *are* functions; they 'take'

objects in their conveniently incomplete slot and map those objects onto the truth values.

Davidson praises Frege's grasp of the problem and his attempt at a solution:

> Of all the efforts to account for the role of predicates that we have reviewed,
> Frege's is the only one that, by its treatment of predicates, clearly makes
> sentences semantic units. Of the attempts we have considered, Frege alone has
> assigned a semantic role to predicates which promises to explain how sentences
> are connected to truth values.[146]

Frege's account explains why sentences can be true or false. On Frege's account a meaningful

sentence isn't merely a list of objects; there must be a concept involved. Concepts are,

importantly, unsaturated or incomplete. The concept/object combination accounts for the truth or

falsity of the sentence, as the concept maps the object onto 'The True' or 'The False'.[147] There

are of course famous problems with this account. According to Frege, anything we can

definitely describe is an object, and so it is very hard to talk about concepts without somehow

converting them into objects. Any answer to the question 'Which concept are you talking

about?' looks like it has three possible answers; a definite description, a name, or an ostension.

For Frege, the things such speech acts identify are all and only objects.[148]

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[146] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, pp 133-134. Strictly speaking, sentences still look like lists in Frege: they are lists of terms which stand for objects and terms which stand for concepts. Frege has explained why *thoughts* are true or false: thoughts are what sentences express. Thus, he has a solution for the unity of the *proposition*, not the unity of the *sentence*.

[147] This is meant to be a summary of the more detailed explanation of Frege's views which I undertook in Chapter 2. Readers who find this blithe should revisit Chapter 2 for more detail; the current discussion is merely to set a historical precedent for Davidson's appropriation of Tarski's theory.

[148] Hence his claim that this forces him to say that the city of Berlin is a city, but the concept horse is not a concept. Frege, 1892, *On Concept and Object,* in Beaney, 1997, p 185.

Davidson credits Tarski with solving the problem of predication.[149] Tarski notes Frege's

insight that predicates are *like* functions in that they are incomplete, as opposed to objects.

Unlike Frege, Tarski doesn't say that *since* predicates are like functions, they must *be* functions;

if this were so Tarski could be read as a correspondence theorist, which he is not: Tarski does not

provide discrete entities that true sentences map on *to*.[150] Tarski thought of predicates in roughly

the same way that Frege did, without taking Frege's position of associating entities with

predicates or whole sentences. Tarski's (and Davidson's) conception of what a predicate is

coincides nicely with the view that I attributed to Frege in Chapter 2: "A predicate is any

expression obtained from a sentence by subtracting one or more singular terms."[151] Davidson

notes that:

> [Tarski's] focus on the role of variables or the spaces they occupy [in incomplete
> expressions like 'x is bald'] is analogous to Frege's, and was inspired by him.
> Tarski 's essential innovation is to make ingenious use of the idea that predicates
> are *true of* the entities which are named by the constants that occupy their spaces
> or are quantified over by the variables which appear in the same spaces and are
> bound by quantifiers.[152]

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[149] Though, of course, not *realizing* that he had solved the problem of predication.

[150] Note that my argument in Chapter 3 claims that, as a result of either fact fission or fact fusion, the only entities which would serve as sentential extensions are either no more finely grained than the truth predicate itself, or so finely grained that they look like theoretical postulates rather than empirical truth-makers. A strategy open to anyone who wants to claim that predicates are functions might be to claim that predicates are functions which map objects onto either the true or the false, or perhaps onto the world or the null set (or any two objects). Such a theory is consistent with what I argued in Chapter 3, although it renders correspondence useless as an informative definition of truth; the simple one place predicate '_is true' seems capable of doing all the necessary work that such a theory of predication requires.

[151] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 132. Again, as I noted in the footnote to the definition in my discussion in Chapter 2, Frege considers only one-place predicates, and so would omit the 'or more' from this definition. Since we want an account of predication that accommodates predicates with n-many places, the 'or more' is apt for our discussion.

[152] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 159.

If predicates are *true of* objects and events, we don't need to posit entities to associate with the predicates, and we can avoid regress. The claim is that it was a *mistake* to look for some kind of glue that holds the entity associated with the subject and the entity associated with the predicate together and that explains *why* the utterance is truth functional. The right explanation works the other way around; it is *because* predicates are *true of* objects and events that the sentences *have* propositional unity. Again, we find that Davidson's position is that the concept of truth is central. This is Davidson's point: he ends *Truth and Predication* with "Thus, the contribution of predicates to the truth conditions of sentences depends on and is explained by our grasp of the concept of truth."[153]

5.3 Predicates, Properties, and Universals

Davidson assigns no entities to either the predicate or the sentence as a whole. Properties aren't in the picture yet, but this is not to deny that talk of properties *makes sense*. The moral so far is that the postulation of properties *isn't* needed for an account of predication which explains the unity of the sentence in general. This leaves us with the attractive possibility of explaining properties *in terms of* predicates, instead of the other way around: we may say an object x has

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[153] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 163.

property p just in case the predicate '_is p' is true of x.[154] In a discussion of properties, Davidson

notes:

> Red objects tend to cause us to believe the objects are red, square objects tend to
> cause us to believe the objects are square…It is because the objects and events
> have the properties they do that they cause us to have the attitudes they do…What
> makes our judgements of the "descriptive" properties of things true or false is the
> fact that the same properties tend to cause the same beliefs in different observers,
> and when observers differ, we assume there is an explanation.[155]

Here Davidson again commits himself to the kind of externalism I noted in the last chapter. Note

that Davidson *doesn't* here say that properties are *in* the objects we predicate them of. Rather,

the position I attribute to Davidson is the following: our predicates are *true of* objects that *have*

properties. Properties, on this view, *aren't anywhere*.[156]

Davidson applies this view not only to properties, but to universals. Davidson credits

Ramsey with noting that in 'Socrates is wise' the subject is Socrates, and '_is wise' is the

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[154] This depends on how we want to couch our property-language. If properties are 'being p', like 'being red' then we can alter the definition to read 'an object x has the property of being p just in case '_is p' is true of x'. The point is that properties are defined *in terms of predicates*. Similarly, the simple sentence 'Theaetetus sits' has no copula, but if we want to say that the sentence shows that Theaetetus has the property of sitting (or of being a seated thing, etc.), we should recognize that 'Theaetetus sits' *whatever* we take its truth conditions to be (does it mean that Theaetetus *occasionally* sits, parallel to 'Theaetetus kills' or that Theatetus is currently - or perpetually - sitting?) can be stated in terms employing the predicative copula. Finally, even if it were not the case that such sentences could be stated in terms employing the predicative copula of the form '_is p', we could simply amend our definition of properties. We already agree that 'Theatetus flies' displays sentential unity, so we could simply add '_p' to our definition of properties. Again, the important thing is that we define properties *in terms of predicates*.

[155] Davidson, 1995, "The Objectivity of Values" in *Problems of Rationality*, p 47.

[156] Davidson doubles down on this point in many places. For instance, in his reply to Bill Martin in Davidson's Volume of the Library of Living Philosophers, Davidson says "Of course, it is true that evaluative properties are not in the objects and events we ascribe them to, for *being properties (if we like to talk this way), they are not anywhere*." Davidson 1999 LLP p 358 (emphasis added). In "The Objectivity of Values", Davidson, discussing values, says "It is strange to speak of values as being, 'out there'. The things and events to which he attach values are certainly out there (for the most part, anyway); the properties we predicate of such things are neither here nor there, for *properties have no location*… The same is true of weights, colors, and shapes. These aren't 'out there' — *or anywhere else*." Davidson 2004 PR pp 43-45 (emphasis added). In his unpublished manuscript *The Concept of Objectivity*, Davidson argues "It is simply a property of an individual that he means this or that by what he says, and properties, I never tire of saying, 'Ain't anywhere'. An example which I have often used is sunburn: the property of being sunburned is nowhere, but the burn, though characterized in terms of its cause when we call it 'sunburn', is certainly on the skin of the victim." p. 15.

predicate. However in 'Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates' wisdom is the subject, and '_is a characteristic of Socrates' is the predicate. Davidson notes "Ramsey is right, of course, that universals are particulars as much as Socrates is."[157] This means there is no particular *problem* with the existence of universals or abstract objects. Davidson is often misleadingly read as a kind of nominalist, which he explicitly *isn't*. In a reply to David Lewis, Davidson notes:

> David Lewis says that ontological parsimony is not the subject we're discussing, so we may as well assume any entities that can do us any good. That is exactly my attitude, and always has been. Abstract entities take up no space and cost us nothing.[158]

Elsewhere, Davidson says, "being no nominalist, I think patterns, like shapes and numbers, are as real as can be."[159] Abstract objects and universals, like properties, are not invoked in order to explain the extension of predicates: predicates have no extension. Rather, predicates are true of objects and events, some of which are abstract. We start with the medium sized (non-abstract) objects that evolution has equipped us to detect, and to detect each other detecting.[160] We predicate of some of them that they have a property (p). When we are enough in agreement about what objects '_is p' is true of, we are in a position to quantify over the property p itself, to say of p that it is q, or that anything that is a p is not a q. This is how we introduce abstract objects. Davidson's conception of object and properties, rather than being that of a nominalist, is actually quite catholic.

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[157] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, pp 145-146.

[158] Davidson, 1974, "Replies to Lewis and Quine" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* p 281.

[159] Davidson, 1997, "Indeterminism and Antirealism" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, p 82.

[160] In his unpublished *The Concept of Objectivity*, Davidson asks what makes the similarities (both in the causes of creature's responses, and the responses themselves) that count as relevant similarities *the* relevant ones, and answers "The answer again is obvious; it is we, because of the way we are constructed (evolution had something to do with this), that find these responses natural and easy to class together." p 17.

The view that properties, universals, and abstract objects (i) aren't anywhere, and (ii) are defined in terms of predicates, has some interesting implications; doubly so when we combine the view with the triangular externalism I outlined in Chapter 4. Backing up a bit, recall that 'This is Peter' is informative and true in the triangular ostensive situation. Remembering that from the point of view of the radical interpreter, it makes no sense to doubt that 'This is Peter' is true (at least not until we can place 'This is Peter' against a background of *other* mostly true beliefs). Davidson noted that "names learned this way are guaranteed a reference".[161] Why are names learned this way guaranteed a reference? It must be because we (as learners) must take 'This is Peter' to be *true*. In the very same passage Davidson says the following:

> This leaves predicates. As with names, some unstructured predicates must be learned by ostension: again, what is uttered may be single words, treated as sentences ('This is green', 'That is a book'). Predicates less directly tied to perception are interpreted as they occur in sentences which also contain ostensibly learned predicates, or through their relations to sentences containing such predicates.[162]

I suggest we move very slowly through this passage. Now, for the *same* reason that an interpreter necessarily needs to count 'This is Peter' as true, the interpreter *must* count 'This is a book' as true. Note what this buys us given (ii) above: we take '_is a book' to be true of the object that the ostensive 'This' picks out via triangulation. Since an object x has property p just in case '_is p' is true of x, we may say that we have introduced the property *book*.[163] Since properties are explained in terms of predicates, for there to be a property *book* is simply for '_is a

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[161] Davidson, 2005 *Truth and Predication*, p 162.

[162] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 162

[163] Or *being a book*, or *bookness*, or whatever your preferred property-language is.

book' to be true of an object. This works for 'This is green' as well: we assume that the speaker

is speaking truly, and therefore that the object really is green, and this is all there is to the

property *green*.

5.4 Externalism and Propositional Content

Note that this approach makes no appeal to 'cutting nature at the joints.' According to the

approach to predicates I have outlined, our predicates joint nature, and intersubjective agreement

is the ultimate standard for whether or not certain properties exist. The appeal to 'nature's joints'

is, on this account, the attempt to project conceptual distinctions (properties) out into spacetime,

an attempt to give a *location* of properties, and on my account properties aren't *anywhere*.

Davidson agrees. Discussing the benefits of the account of triangulation as the source of the

concept of truth, and of thought generally, Davidson summarizes some benefits of his account:

> (1) With two creatures in general responding in characteristic ways to distal
> stimuli, we can speak of the *focus* of their responses, the common cause of the
> most frequent cases.
> (2) If thought were present, this would provide an obvious indication of the
> *content* of the thought.
> (3) There is a space for the concept of error, since when there is a divergence in
> normally similar reactions, we can say what they deviate from, namely the norm
> set by the usual cases.
> (4) Finally, and perhaps most important, and this is what we are most apt to miss:
> we have moved the reliance on the notion of relevant similarity into the realm of
> animal interests, where it surely belongs. Here is the sense in which we have
> moved reliance on the concept of relevant similarity into the realm of animal
> interests. We have done it not by projecting thought-like distinctions onto

inanimate nature, as Plato and Aristotle both did in their ways ("dividing at the joints"), or, as we still find sophisticated philosophers like John McDowell doing, but rather by seeing the relevant similarity of one animal's responses through the eyes of another animal. In other words, it is by accepting the Wittgensteinian intuition that the only legitimate source of objectivity is intersubjectivity.[164]

The passage provides a succinct summary of what work the interpretive triangle is supposed to do. (1) assures us that, in the most basic cases, our thought is grounded in external reality. (2), given (1), by fixing the content of thoughts with proximal causes, assures us that our thoughts are mostly true. (3) explains how error is possible; the second person provides a simultaneous other perspective against which we measure our own responses. This should be familiar from the previous chapter.

I want to focus momentarily on (4). Since there is, on this account, nothing *more* to there being a property than that a predicate be true of an object, we don't need to posit that nature has joints which our predicates do (or, in our fearful skeptical moments, don't!) *really* correspond to or identify. On this view, there is no more sense to the claim that we succeed in dividing nature at the joints than there is to the claim that we fail to divide nature at the joints. *We joint nature*. Davidson says:

> It is a brute fact — a fact about each brute, including you and me — that each reacts to stimuli as it does; but it is a suggestive fact that many of these brutes react in more or less the same ways.[165]

What does this suggest? Well, for one, it suggests that things are more or less the way we think they are; the suggestion follows from (2) above: (2) is a version of triangular externalism.

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[164] Davidson, *The Concept of Objectivity*, pp 23-24.

[165] Davidson, *The Concept of Objectivity,* p 20.

Intersubjectivity, according to Davidson, grounds objectivity. Intersubjective agreement, then, is our guide to what kinds of things there are (objects and events), and the way those things are (properties). Davidson notes what his externalism shares with the externalism of Tyler Burge:

> The externalist grants that the world might be very different than I believe it to be and yet my sense organs be stimulated as they now are. But in this case the contents of our thoughts would be different. This is the externalist thesis (ET): the contents of our perceptual beliefs are fixed by their normal distal (not proximal) causes.[166]

Davidson agrees with Burge that distal causes fix the content of our perceptual beliefs. The natural question is how to *individuate* the distal cause of perceptual belief. Davidson thinks that Burge's approach, which *lacks* the second person, fails to fix such a cause. Burge claims that the distal stimuli that we should consider as the cause for a given "perceptual representation" is what "in some complex sense of 'normally', they normally stem from and are applied to".[167] As I said in the last chapter, this leaves the choice of stimulus infinitely broad, from retinal impressions, to the distal object, to the Big Bang: simply saying that what we mean by 'normally stem from' is the *correct* stimulus without appeal to triangulation seems to *assume* what we want to explain. According to Davidson, "Burge's perceptual externalism is intuitively attractive, but by failing to say what picks out the relevant cause of our perceptual beliefs it fails to account for the content of those beliefs."[168] To the question of 'what picks out the relevant cause', Davidson has

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[166] Davidson, *The Concept of Objectivity*, p 16. The (ET) abbreviation was added by me, to make exposition easier later in the chapter.

[167] Burge, "Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception" in McDowell and Pettit (eds.), 1986 p 131. Note that the 'representation' verbiage is Burge's not Davidson's. Davidson eschews talk of representations in favor of talk of beliefs.

[168] Davidson, *The Concept of Objectivity*, p 18.

an answer: it is triangulation that picks out the relevant cause, that *fixes* the distal cause, which

via (2) fixes the *content* of the perceptual belief.

5.5 Semantics, Stroud and Skepticism

We have been moving slowly through (1)-(4). If Davidson is right, then radical

skepticism cannot get off the ground:

> It should now be clear what insures that our view of the world is, in its plainest
> features, largely correct. The reason is that the stimuli that cause our most basic
> verbal responses also determine what those verbal responses mean, and the
> content of the beliefs that accompany them. The nature of interpretation
> guarantees both that a large number of our simplest perceptual beliefs are true,
> and that the nature of these beliefs is known to others…. Any particular belief or
> set of beliefs about the world around us may be false. What cannot be the case is
> that our general picture of the world and our place in it is mistaken, for it is this
> picture which informs the rest of our beliefs and makes them intelligible, whether
> they be true or false.[169]

This passage echoes others found throughout Davidson's later work. Barry Stroud has taken

Davidson's arguments against global skepticism very seriously. Stroud argues that Davidson has

not shown that skepticism is false, though Stroud *does* think that Davidson does have an

argument that skepticism may not be *coherent*.[170] Thus, Stroud thinks a kind of skepticism can

survive Davidson's (and Burge's) externalism.[171]

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[169] Davidson, 1991, "Three Varieties of Knowledge" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, pp 213-214.

[170] Note that Davidson himself vacillated between seeing his account as an argument against skepticism, or rather as an attempt not to refute the skeptic but to tell the skeptic to 'get lost'. Stroud thinks that Davidson only has ammunition for the latter view.

[171] Stroud often groups Davidson and Burge together, which can be problematic. As I said in the last chapter, Burge's account lacks a triangulating second person, which does open Burge up to some skeptical attacks that Davidson's position can avoid (i.e. what the distal perceptual cause of a perceptual belief *is*).

Stroud puts the skeptical problem in terms of accepting two independent conjuncts; he

argues that no one can coherently hold both conjuncts true:

> The possibility we are asked to consider [radical skepticism] at the beginning has
> two parts, or conjuncts. It is the possibility that we have all the beliefs we now
> have in this, that, and the other aspect of the world, and that those beliefs are all or
> for the most part false. [Externalism] with respect to our thoughts about and
> attribution of beliefs means that we could not consistently find the first half of the
> possibility to be realized without finding its second half not to be so. And if we
> found the second conjunct to be true, we could not consistently find the first half
> of the possibility to be realized. Attribution of the beliefs we attribute requires
> finding them for the most part true; finding a certain set of propositions for the
> most part false rules out assigning them as contents of the beliefs of the people
> with whom one shares a common world.[172]

This is essentially correct, and it is exactly the position Davidson proposes. What Stroud thinks

Davidson has *successfully* established is that we must necessarily find others in agreement with

us if we are to interpret them at all; since we hold our beliefs true, we must hold the beliefs of

others as (mostly) true as well.

Stroud stresses that at this point, *all* he thinks Davidson has successfully established is

that interpretation ensures *agreement* that subject and interpreter hold the same sentences true;

Stroud thinks we haven't shown that the sentences held true are *thereby* largely true. Stroud

makes an interesting analogy to Moore's paradox:

> Our position with respect to [radical skepticism] is therefore similar to a person's
> relation to the apparently paradoxical sentence 'I believe that it is raining, and it is
> not raining'. That is not something one could consistently believe or assert—but

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[172] Stroud, 2011, p 269. Stroud here is discussing both Burge and Davidson, and so uses Burge's 'Anti-individualism' instead of 'externalism'.

not because it says something that could not possibly be true. It is possible that I believe that it is raining when it is not raining. That is a possibility with two parts, or conjuncts. The first does not imply that the second is false, and the second does not imply that the first is false. It is in that sense a genuine possibility. But no one can consistently hold in his own case that the possibility is actual, that both conjuncts are true.[173]

Stroud argues that the analogy between his two examples holds; as in the case of Moore's Paradox, the two conjuncts in the radical skepticism example might *be* jointly satisfied, but it would be incoherent to *think and maintain that they were*.

I think Stroud's conclusion, that it would be incoherent for an agent to hold true both conjuncts, is correct in both the examples. However, I don't think the conclusion is correct *because* Stroud's analogy holds. Stroud's analogy, I argue, does *not* hold; the case of radical skepticism concerns belief *generally*, the case of Moore's Paradox a *specific* belief. If we have been following Davidson so far, then *only* in the latter case can the two conjuncts both be true. It certainly is true that one might assert 'I believe that it is raining' and it not be the case that it is raining. However, if Davidson is right about the nature of belief, then it simply *cannot* be the case that one could have all the *same beliefs* one currently has, and yet those beliefs be mostly false. Davidson makes the point most forcefully in "Three Varieties of Knowledge":

It has seemed obvious to many philosophers that if each of our beliefs about the world, taken alone, may be false, there is no reason why all such beliefs might not be false. This reasoning is fallacious. It does not follow, from the fact that any one of the bills in my pocket may have the highest serial number, that all the bills in my pocket may have the highest serial number, or from the fact that anyone

[173] Stroud, 2011, p 269.

> may be elected president, that everyone may be elected president. Nor could it
> happen that all our beliefs about the world might be false.[174]

Davidson accuses 'many philosophers' of arguing that if two situations, A and B, each possibly obtain, then it is possible that both A and B obtain. This *clearly* cannot be the case in cases where A and B are mutually exclusive (i.e. A = the Republican candidate will win the presidency, B = the Democratic candidate will win the presidency, or A =it is currently raining at location L, B = it is not currently raining at location L).

Stroud's position is more nuanced than that of 'many philosophers'; he doesn't argue that *because* both conjuncts can obtain independently, both conjuncts can obtain jointly. Rather, Stroud argues that we can't coherently *maintain* both conjuncts. This incoherence, though, *does not guarantee* that both conjuncts *don't* in fact jointly obtain. Stroud thinks that interpretation necessarily involves agreement, and that agreement means an interpreter assigns sentences *the interpreter holds true* to the agent being interpreted. Agreement, Stroud thinks, is not enough to justify the claim that the sentences jointly held true are *actually* true.

We should explore Davidson's claim that 'many philosophers' are wrong in their claim that "if each of our beliefs about the world, taken alone, may be false, there is no reason why all such beliefs might not be false."[175] The examples Davidson provides clearly show that the argument's form is invalid; we can see that the reason their argument is fallacious has to do with the entities involved in both possible conjuncts. Sometimes such reasoning works: if it is possible that any of our three tosses of the same coin are heads, then it is possible that all our three tosses of the coin are heads. Sometimes the reasoning fails: if it is possible that any of our

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[174] Davidson, "Epistemology Externalized" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, pp 194-195.

[175]Ibid, pp 194-195.

three draws from a single deck are the red Queens, then it is possible that all of our 3 draws from a single deck are the red Queens. What accounts for us knowing that the former is good reasoning and the latter is not is that we know some things about coin tosses and card decks that render the first example possible and the second example impossible: the results of separate coin tosses don't place constraints on each other, while the results of separate draws from a single deck do. Furthermore, we know of each individual (standard) card deck that it contains only two red Queens.

In Davidson's example concerning the serial numbers of the bills in his pocket, we know a few things about the serial numbers on bills that render the two conjuncts mutually exclusive. We know that no two bills have the same serial number, and that no two unique numbers can both be the highest. We also know of the Presidency that it is a position that only one person may occupy at a time. Analogously, if (ET) is correct, then we know that the normal distal causes of perceptual beliefs fix the content of those beliefs. Similarly, since (2) *identifies* the content of the belief *with* the triangulated distal cause, if (2) is correct our basic perceptual beliefs must be mostly true. We know of decks that they have only two red Queens, and we know of any system of perceptual beliefs that is complex enough to constitute thought that most of those perceptual beliefs must be true.

I opened this section by saying that if Davidson is right, then skepticism cannot get off the ground. In a very real sense, *even if* only *Stroud is right*, skepticism cannot get off the ground: for while the radical skepticism is a possibility, it is a possibility that could never be coherently *entertained*. I argue that Stroud's position is coherent, but that in order to deny that

interpretation yields not just agreement but truth, Stroud must deny (ET).[176] For (ET) fixes the

content of our beliefs via the triangulated distal causes of those beliefs. According to (ET) the

distal cause of a perceptual belief is that which *fixes the content* of the belief. As stated earlier,

had the distal causes been different "the *contents* of our thoughts would be different."[177] So if

you follow Davidson closely, Stroud's analogy between radical skepticism and Moore's paradox

does not hold. Stroud argues that if we found that the second conjunct of radical skepticism

obtained we wouldn't be able to assert the first conjunct. If (ET) is true, then it would simply be

impossible to *find* that the second conjunct obtained, for the same reason that it would be

impossible to draw three red queens from the deck. If Davidson's particular version of

externalism is correct, then belief is *necessarily* veridical, as standard card decks *necessarily*

contain only two red Queens.

5.6 The Metaphysics of Truth

      I want to take up an issue that I tabled a few chapters ago, concerning the metaphysical

status of the property *truth*. What I have said about properties generally applies to the property

truth as well. That we normally understand each other and agree about when and what things are

green is what assures us that the things we normally agree are green are in fact green. This is

enough to permit us to say both that we possess the concept GREEN, and that some things have

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[176] In this sense Stroud's position is *stronger* than Davidson's, for Davidson's conclusion depends on accepting (ET) while Stroud's does not. This is welcome news; even if we don't have Davidson's conception of belief, Stroud claims that skepticism is not a coherent combination of beliefs that one could hold. We may still tell the skeptic to 'get lost'.

[177] Davidson, *The Concept of Objectivity*, p 16. Italics added

the property (instantiate the property, etc.) *green*.[178] It should be clear that triangulation (and

hence the concept TRUTH) play a leading role in this. What might not be clear is that since this

conception of properties applies to properties simpliciter, it applies to the property *truth* as well.

Note also that the conception of properties I've put forward makes no appeal to cutting

nature at the joints. Since this is true for properties generally, there isn't a problematic question

about whether the property truth is 'metaphysically substantive,' and the same goes for any

property that we can truly ascribe of any object.[179] For the Davidsonian, the question does not

arise. If our concepts and predicates are what joint nature, I argue that it makes little sense to say

that our predicates succeed or fail at cutting nature at the *real* joints; this is like wondering

whether we have cut a pie into the *correct* number of pieces. We may cut the pie any way we

like, and it will have the number of pieces it does because of the way in which we cut it. Our

purposes, our capacities, and features of the pie itself may place constraints on what counts as an

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[178] Note that 'x has the property p' here is just a fancy way of saying that '_is p' is truthfully predicable of x. Having in this sense does not mean containing.

[179] Asay (2013), defends his version of the primitive thesis by arguing that *truth* is a metaphysically deflationary property. The distinctions Asay uses to draw this conclusion are the conceptions of properties as 'sparse' or 'abundant', where abundant properties are metaphysically deflationary: "The sparse properties are those that account for the genuine resemblances between objects . Abundant properties, by contrast, can be shared between objects without bestowing any resemblance upon them. There need not be any genuine feature held in common between all the objects within a three-and-a-half mile radius of the exact center of Missouri, though there are genuine features held in common between all samples of gold." p 105. A Davidsonian might say that, since properties (or features, whatever they are) aren't *in* the objects that *have* them, it is clear that the things that are all within a three-and-a-half mile radius of the exact center of Missouri do have a genuine feature or property in common: the feature of being within an three-and-a-half mile radius of the exact center of Missouri. The objects have this property in common *in virtue it being the case that* '_is within a three-and-a-half mile radius of the exact center of Missouri' is *true* of them. Asay doesn't hold (FC) or (TM) explicitly. Rather, he wants his form of primitivism to accommodate other commitments. The position Asay is trying to accommodate is a correspondence theory of truth that accepts (TM) and (FC), and that would explain (FC) in terms of objects and properties. I've argued that the correspondence theorist's combination of (TM) and (FC) is a toxic one in Chapter 3, and I've argued earlier in this chapter that (a) properties aren't needed to explain the unity of the proposition, and (b) we can fruitfully explain properties in terms of predicates, instead of predicates in terms of properties, so the question doesn't require an answer from my standpoint. Since properties aren't *anywhere*, aren't invoked as components of *truth-makers,* and aren't invoked as entities in order to explain the propositional unity of the sentence, from the standpoint I advocate we don't need the sparse/abundant distinction, and, hence, don't need to draw the distinction clearly.

acceptable cutting, but there is no *single privileged* way to cut the pie, no single way to cut that is in accordance with what the *real* pieces of the *pie qua pie* are.

5.7 Naming and Predication

There are many difficulties with the Davidsonian approach. One difficulty springs from the surface similarity of the sentences 'This is Peter' and 'This is green'. In neither case will a single ostensive definition serve to unambiguously fix the reference of the name or the class of entities the property is true of. Problematically, at the time of a purported ostensive definition, Peter might actually be green. What the interpreter needs to do is observe that a subject utters the first sentence (mostly) only while triangularly and ostensively indicating Peter, and the second (mostly) while triangulating on and ostensively identifying green things. This will provide evidence that 'green' is a general term (because it can be truthfully applied to many things), 'Peter' a name of a unique individual. So the story goes, I think, according to Davidson, for he does seem open to the claim that there is a difference between names like 'Peter' and predicates like '_is green'.[180]

I am going to suggest a different, but I argue Davidsonian, interpretation of what are traditionally considered proper names: names like 'Peter'. I suggest we treat such names as a kind of definite description. I want to look very closely at the following paragraph at the very end of *Truth and Predication*:

> Some names are learned by direct ostentation and as if they were unaided in
> sentences: what may be said aloud is just a name, understood as a short sentence

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[180] At the very least he is agnostic between the view that there *is* a difference and the view which I am going to articulate. My view is open to Davidson, and is the one which I think he *ought* to take. See footnote 186 for why I think Davidson ought to make the move as well.

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('This is Peter', 'That is Paul'). Names learned in this way are guaranteed a

reference. Names learned less directly can then be treated as definite descriptions.

This leaves predicates. As with names, some unstructured predicates must be

learned by ostentation: again, what is uttered may be single words, treated as

sentences ('This is green', 'That is a book'). Predicates less directly tied to

perception are interpreted as they occur in sentences which also contain ostensibly

learned predicates, or through their relations to sentences containing such

predicates.[181]

It's clear that Davidson thinks that some names can be treated as definite descriptions: those that

are 'less directly learned'. I want to suggest some reasons for treating any 'common' name (i.e.

names like 'Peter', 'Paul' and 'Mary') as a kind of definite description.[182]

I want to recall Davidson's claim (which he also claims is Frege's), that a predicate is

"any expression got from a sentence by removing one or more singular terms."[183] When we look

at 'This is Peter' we can see that '_is Peter' would then be a *predicate*. I claimed last chapter that

in learning the name 'Peter', we shouldn't think that we simply use 'Peter' to tag an object,

rather we should think that '_is Peter' is informatively true of a triangulated person. So, '_is

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[181] Davidson, 2005, *Truth and Predication*, p 162.

[182] Someone might object at this point, claiming that names are rigid designators while descriptions are (usually) not. There are two things to say about this objection. First, Davidson's project has no foundational role for reference to play, as it takes the primary semantic unit to be the sentence as a whole. On this picture, reference is a theoretical relation, one that is inscrutable and indeterminate in the Quinean sense: if one referential scheme (interpretation of names and predicates) successfully interprets a subject, there will be another, different interpretation with the same truth-conditions (remember last chapter's interpretation of 'Raleigh smokes' in C1 and C2). Davidson himself has no need for the concept of rigid designation: at one point, discussing and disagreeing with Putnam's Twin Earth-based claim that the experiment shows conclusively that 'Water' rigidly identifies H20, Davidson says "I realize that this remark, like many others in this piece, may show that I don't know a rigid designator when I see one. I don't." Davidson, "Knowing One's Own Mind" in SIO p 29. Second, supposing we want to keep the notion of rigid designation, we might argue that some descriptions *do* designate rigidly: 'the successor of 2' for example. Someone here might say that such descriptions designate rigidly only de jure, not de facto, and that proper names and only proper names de facto designate rigidly. The descriptions I will employ in the next section do designate rigidly, and arguably do so de facto. If someone wants to press me on the issue and claim that they are not de facto rigid designators, then I am happy to get along without de facto rigid designation.

[183] Davidson, 2005 *Truth and Predication*, p 149.

Peter' is, according to this treatment, a predicate which introduces the name 'Peter', a predicate that *is true of* the object which is triangulated via the ostensive 'This'. The picture I have in mind then is that the real logically proper names of a language will be the demonstrative terms 'this' or 'that'.[184] Of course there is no problem in maintaining that what we think of as names really are names, provided we don't think they are, in Russell's sense, logically proper. The point is that we introduce names via predication, not by simply tagging.[185]

Why Davidson should think this is so stems from his commitment to restricting a theory of meaning to what can be learned through radical translation. For, I noted earlier that Peter may be green at the time either 'This is Peter' or 'This is green' is uttered. There is no unique linguistic mark that indicates that a subject is using a general or a singular term. How do we understand that 'This is Peter' will apply uniquely, while 'This is Green' will not? One answer is that we have a theory that 'Peter' is a name, and names are distinct from predicates in that names are always unique. Another way to approach this is by reducing the naming relation to predication, quantification, and ostension. We might construe names like any other predicate, and hold that *what* we learn when we successfully learn the name 'Peter' is better understood as

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[184] This of course looks like a version of Russell, and it is. The difference is that 'this' and 'that' will not stand for sense data, but rather for (at least at the ground floor of language) triangulated medium sized objects in the distal environment of at least two interpreters.

[185] Delia Graff Fara argues for a similar interpretation in the forthcoming "Names are Predicates" *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 124, No. 1, 2015. Fara explicitly claims "names are true of their bearers." On my view, predicates involving names will be true of their bearers, and there is nothing special about common names like 'Peter' that separates them from terms like 'Green'. Fara thinks names like 'Peter', when used as a subject term, really conceal an unpronounced definite article 'the', and so 'Peter sits' should be read as 'the Peter sits' (I use strikethrough to indicate something unpronounced). Fara's position that names 'are true of' their bearers isn't something that I subscribe to; while I'm happy to grant that '_is Peter' or even '_is the Peter' is true of Peter, I don't think that 'Peter' or 'the Peter' is true of Peter. Since the view of predicates I'm taking is that of a sentence with one or more of the singular terms removed, we can see that the operation involved in extracting 'the Peter' from 'This is the Peter' has extracted more than one or more singular terms: the copula was removed as well.

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'this is the unique x such that x is Peter', where the 'is' in the quoted sentence is the is of predication.[186]

Interestingly, Neale provides some ammunition for the view that names can be thought of this way. Consider the name *a*, and the definite description *ix(x=a)* which reads "the unique x such that x is a" Neale says:

> The expression *ix(x=a)* is *technically* a Russellian description, but there is some inclination, even among the staunchest Russellians, to view it as a verbose form of *a*, which *technically* it is not (since it is an incomplete symbol). Nevertheless, there is an itch here that needs scratching.[187]

I suggest we scratch this itch until it bleeds.[188] Neale here seems to be saying that we might think that *a* and *ix(i=a)* are the *same*, and so *ix(i=a)* is a verbose form of *a*. Well, we might make the same move in the other direction, and think that since *a* and *ix(i=a)* are the same, *a* is an abbreviated form of *ix(i=a)*.[189] If this is the case, then we can explain common names in

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[186] The uniqueness claim would be otiose if uniqueness were built into the name relation machinery. Note that this account is leaner than a name-relation theory; we can do the work of common names with predicates, quantification, and ostension, all of which a proponent of the name relation theory needs anyway. My theory has fewer moving parts. That I think Davidson ought to adopt this view is bolstered by Davidson's claim: "Is the name-relation the sole point at which the entire conversation is tied to the real world? No, for we quantify over endless un-named entities. It is the name-relation which may be superfluous, either by use of Russell's theory of descriptions or in some other way. Any desired distinctions between objects can be made if there is a one-place predicate , no matter how complex, which is true of one of the objects but not of the other. This was, of course, Russell's thought when he suggested that most of what are considered proper names should be supplanted by definite descriptions." Davidson, 1995, *Truth and Predication*, p 161.

[187] Neale, 2001 pp 125-126.

[188] I would remind the reader that I've already made use of the similarity between *Fa* and *a = ix (x = a & Fx)* in my discussion of slingshots in Chapter 3, so the itch might well *already* be bleeding.

[189] Someone might claim that I am smuggling in the is of identity in the use of '*ix(x=a)*'. Neale's discussion is in the context of a passage where he is discussing descriptions of the form *ix(xRa)*, where *R* is an unspecified relation. Neale asks about cases where R is the relation of identity; that is, R represents the is of identity. We should note that if we take *R* to be a symbol expressing the (ordered) is of predication, we can simply substitute *R* for = and obtain '*ix(xRa)*', a description that has as its denotation only a. Or, similarly, we might employ '*ix(Ax)*' which might be read 'the unique x such that A is true of x', and we might claim that '*ix(Ax)*', since it makes the uniqueness claim (as A is true of only x) and remembering that *x* here is a demonstratively ostended object, allows us to then use *a* as a common name and quantify over *a*. Again, on this view the only logically proper names are the demonstrative 'this' and 'that' which refer to triangulated objects.

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terms of predicates.[190] If this is the case, quantification and predication enter the picture early

(very early: at the very beginning of interpretation). Since Davidson thought that the naming

relation itself might be replaced by Russell's theory of descriptions, I argue that this move is

open to him. Given that Davidson wants to take reference as theoretical, I argue that this move is

one he ought to welcome.

5.8 Predicates, Triangulation, and Reference

I have shown how I think one may explain away common names via predication. I noted

that according to this view, the real logically proper names are demonstratives. My account of

triangulation depends on demonstratives functioning like logically proper names. In this sense,

we have not dispensed with the notion of reference, but have restricted its role considerably. The

strict notion of reference still plays a crucial role: the medium sized objects that we can

ostensively individuate are our way into language and thought generally via triangulation. One

might wonder what accounts for this ability. I think Davidson's account fits nicely with the

theories of awareness and of Multiple Object Tracking of Zenon Pylyshyn.

Pylyshyn's research purports to establish that there are visual capacities in (at least)

humans to track distal objects over time:

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[190] Recently, E.J. Lowe alluded to employing this strategy (which he immediately abandons). Lowe notes that some
philosophers try to eliminate predication by reducing predication to identity and reference. "A more promising
strategy might seem to be to try to eliminate reference in favour of predication and quantification, by construing
'Mars is red' as meaning 'There is exactly one thing that is Mars and it is red', in line with Russell's theory of
descriptions." Lowe immediately adds "However the predicate '_is Mars' ostensibly means '_is identical with
Mars', in which reference is again apparently made to Mars." Lowe, E.J. 2013, p 204. Note that if we take the route
I just advocated, where 'Mars' is fixed descriptively, and 'Mars' is shorthand for 'the unique x such that Mars is true
of x', we don't smuggle in reference in the way Lowe deplores. Interestingly, Lowe himself is sympathetic to the
view that truth is primitive.

I have proposed that the capacity to individuate and track several independently moving things is accomplished by a mechanism in the early vision module that I have called FINSTs (I call them "Fingers of INSTantiation" because they were initially viewed as a mechanism for binding the arguments of visual predicates to objects in the world). This primitive, non conceptual mechanism functions to identify, reidentify, and track distal objects. It is an ability we exercise every waking minute, and it has also been understood to be fundamental to the way we see and understand the world.[191]

Roughly speaking, Pylyshyn's FINSTs can be conceived of as visual 'tags' which we are able to apply to medium-sized objects and track over time (according to Pylyshyn's experimental evidence, normal people can do this for around four items). These pre-conceptual 'tags' can be conceived of as fixing the referent of each of the two interpreter's distal stimuli: agreement helps assure each interpreter that they have their 'tags' affixed to the similar objects.[192] Thus we may argue that the 'tagging' of objects by individuals is done at the pre-conceptual stage, via Pylyshyn's FINST's, *not* by the common name relation, which is explained as a form of predication.

Finally, I want to close by looking once more at the quote from Davidson with which I began the chapter:

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[191] Pylyshyn, 2007, p x.

[192] Pylyshyn states that according to his account there is a possible problem concerning which object (or, as Pylyshyn puts it, 'FING') that a FINST tags; a single causal chain alone is insufficient to fix the tag, as the chain has too many links. This is the same question (what is the external stimulus for our perceptual beliefs?) that Davidson thinks Burge's externalism can't answer, and that Davidson thinks his version of triangulating externalism does answer. Interestingly Pylyshyn thinks a form of triangulation helps solve the problem (literally using the term 'triangulation'), an idea Pylyshyn credits not to Davidson, but to Fodor. Pylyshyn, 2007, p 97fn.

> Language is the organ of propositional perception. Seeing sights and hearing sounds does not require thought with propositional content; perceiving how things are does, and this ability develops along with language.[193]

If my appropriation of Pylyshyn is sound, then we have moved the notion of demonstrative reference into the animal realm, where it surely belongs; for animals see sights and hear sounds. This realm is also pre-conceptual; it is only when we begin to *predicate* of the things that we pick out demonstratively that they are a certain *way*, that language, and therefore thought, enter the picture.

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[193] Davidson, 1997, "Seeing Through Language" in *Truth, Language, and History*, p 135.

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