Introduction

I Re-launching the Davidson Program

Donald Davidson’s program, as I encountered it in the late 1960s, was inspiring and exciting. It appeared that an account of logical forms, coupled with a semantics that eschewed metaphysics, would soon solve or dissolve many philosophical problems. Davidson’s thesis was that the first step to dealing with a philosophical problem was getting the semantics straight. For instance, the first step in answering the question “what things are good” is finding out the logical form of sentences using “good.” The hope was that this kind of ground-clearing would enable real progress on the problems that did not, like the “problem of predication” or whether to believe in sparse or abundant properties, disappear with a proper understanding of semantics.

Much of Davidson’s thinking was profoundly anti-metaphysical, and the Davidsonian program was likewise anti-metaphysical. Predication has no better account than “‘is a frog’ is true of an object just in case the object is a frog.” Truth is not correspondence to anything. Davidson’s account of meaning extended Quine’s ideas about radical translation to a theory of interpretation and an account of meaning without a metaphysics of meanings. Much of Davidson’s work continued the anti-essentialist, anti-metaphysical logical positivist tradition, albeit without the dogmas, without the empiricism, and by and large without the scientism.

Davidson himself implemented only a few parts of this program, and only suggested lines of thought for other parts of the program. His work on events, causation, adverbs, and the mind-body problem were actual concrete applications of his semantics. The project of finding logical forms for constructions of natural languages was being taken up most effectively by linguistic
semanticists following the alternative path of Montague.\(^1\) This side of recursive truth-conditional semantics was, from a Quinean point of view, completely shameless in invoking possible worlds, exotic functions, and the like.\(^2\) The linguistic semanticists by and large accepted notions of presupposition, lexical meanings, and other notions which a Davidsonian would eschew. Considering the scope of the original program, relatively little work was carried out trying to implement the Davidsonian program in the austere form that it began.

Davidson thus left many important topics untouched. Davidson followed Quine in not trying to give a semantics for modalities.\(^3\) Unlike Quine, though, Davidson cannot just claim that there are no necessary truths. As long as some sentences using “necessary,” “possible” and the like are true, these words must make some contribution to the truth-conditions of sentences. Other questions which the Davidson program in principle had to give a semantics were never

\(^1\) A few of his students produced Davidson-inspired accounts of adjectives, proper names, and quantifiers. See Burge (1972, 1973, 1974) Wallace (1971, 1972) and Wheeler (1972, 1974, 1978). The vast majority of writing connected with Davidson from philosophers, as one would expect, consisted of claiming that there are flaws in Davidson’s implementation of the program rather than carrying out aspects of the program.

\(^2\) Several years ago, I gave a graduate seminar for which the texts were Larsen and Segal’s (1995) and Heim and Kratzer’s (1998). The conclusion reached by the seminar is that these came close to being notational variants.

\(^3\) Davidson gives hints and suggestions. Davidson (1968) suggests the beginnings of a semantics for modalities, but “modality” is not mentioned by name. Davidson (1970a) suggests what a semantics for “ought” should look like, in the course of discussing a problem in the philosophy of mind and action.
addressed either by Davidson or his acolytes. For instance, the question of what propositions, properties, and facts might be has to have an answer, given that there are true affirmative sentences using those terms. Even though Davidson has shown that properties play no role in understanding predication, that propositions as meanings of sentences are not necessary in semantics, and that facts play no role in providing an entity in the world for a sentence to correspond to in order to be true, still there are truths using those count-nouns whose truth-conditions need to be given some sort of account.

Davidson had views about the objectivity of values and ethical notions, which appeared in scattered articles. The philosophical field of ethics, though, was never one of his main interests. His earliest work was on decision-theory, and this was a continuing interest and topic of his writing. The project of connecting the theory of preference with a theory of what is good or what a person should do never got done.

In sum, many parts of a completed Davidsonian program were never even begun. Part of the explanation is to be found in the resurgence of realism. Sometime after 1970, the majority, of philosophers abandoned the whole logical positivist, anti-metaphysical attitude toward philosophical problems that had culminated in Quine and then in nearly pure form, in Davidson’s program.

The very intuitive arguments of Kripke (1980) convinced even Davidsonians that appeals to natures made intuitive sense and had to be right. In my own case, I became convinced that Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, especially Zeta, Eta, and Theta, was almost exactly right. There had to be natures of things and the de re necessities that would be the consequences of such natures. So, at least some of Davidson’s disciples, and certainly very many philosophers who might have been attracted to the program, lost faith.
Now, in 2013, metaphysics is a thoroughly respectable field, with very intelligent philosophers arguing pro and con about whether truth is an explanatory property, what mysterious bonding joins universals to particulars to yield facts, whether Ferraris are entities which persist or perdure, and the like. For instance, the question is asked in the philosophy of mind whether property dualism or substance dualism are equivalent or whether one is preferable to the other. (Lycan, forthcoming). The Quinean-Davidsonian view that property versus substance talk is misdirected talk about predicates is ignored.

Davidsonism and pursuit of the Davidson program has thus become a distinctly minority view. Davidson scholarship, while a burgeoning literature, has become mostly exposition of the details of his actual writings on various topics, rather than an effort to carry out the program. I think this is a very large mistake, and that what has happened is that philosophers have forgotten Davidson’s basic insights about truth, predication, and interpretation. An example of this forgetting is the continued proliferation of “logics” for the various modal predicates and tenses. Quine’s notion of logic as pure structure and Davidson’s minimalist conception of semantics would put these “logics” in their proper place as theories of the truth-conditions of predicates.

A couple of decades ago, I began to realize that the original program was not a dead end, but had been abandoned for inadequate reasons. A kind of forgetting had taken place, analogous

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4 Admittedly, both Davidson and Quine took it as obvious that tenses involved an extra argument-place for times. But that supposition is not essential to their basic anti-essentialist, anti-metaphysical view, as we will show in Chapter 7.
to the forgetting that Kripke\(^5\) rectified. The philosophical orthodoxies before Kripke’s 1970 lectures are a good example of the kind of forgetfulness that can occur in philosophy. As many people have realized, the intuitions Kripke was appealing to are essentially the same as those Aristotle was appealing to in *Metaphysics* Zeta, Eta and Theta. Aristotle was responding to the challenge of Heraclitus against continuants as well as to the inadequate defense of common sense from Plato. Aristotle’s distinction between essence and accident was a defense of common sense. Kripke appealed to essentially the same intuitions. In Kripke’s case, of course, the frame of discussion was names and the conditions for their application. Very different philosophical environments generated very similar accounts of what it takes for this person to be the same over time or in different circumstances. To remind ourselves how much things have changed, remember that Quine (1953b) took the necessity for appealing to Aristotelian essences to be a decisive reason to reject the third grade of modal involvement.

Aristotle’s insights about the necessities implicit in the idea of a lasting being were forgotten because Aristotle took the medium-sized objects of everyday life to be also the primary terms in which scientific explanation takes place. When it became clear that scientific explanations required something other than the objects of ordinary life, corpuscles or atoms rather than men and earth, *all* of Aristotle was abandoned, the insights along with the shortcomings.

\(^5\) Kripke was not alone in implementing this resurrection. Modal logicians such as Hintikka, Marcus and others had views which likewise were close to recapturing the Aristotelian insights via thinking about naming. But the single most effective event was the series of lectures in the Woodrow Wilson School in 1970.
Something similar happened in a shorter time frame with Davidson’s thought. The main apparent defect in Davidson’s program was his rejection of realistic metaphysics, the idea that nature is itself “divided at natural joints.” It seemed to almost everyone that a realistic metaphysics was required in order to accommodate natural Aristotelian Kripkean intuitions, so that Davidson’s views could not be right. As with the rejection of Aristotle in the 17th century, the rejection of Davidson’s program threw out the good with the inadequate. Just as Aristotle’s central insights about the conditions for continuants remained valid, so, it seems to me are Davidson’s basic anti-metaphysical ideas about semantics, predication, and interpretation. In addition some of the core ideas in Davidson’s implementation of the program are in fact part of the correct account, even if the exact version Davidson proposed is mistaken.

There were other reasons philosophers ceased to take the Davidson program as worth pursuing. Some of the abandonment of the program was due to excessive focus on the particular implementations Davidson himself made of his central ideas rather than on the fruitful central ideas themselves. Some of Davidson’s particular implementations and applications of his program have come under attack and have rightly been judged unacceptable. His elegant solution to the mind-body problem, anomalous monism, is flawed by his residual scientism. Davidson’s views about anomalous monism, events, and causation were more extreme than they needed to be, and implausible. But that does not mean that the fundamental ideas were mistaken. The idea that the mind-body problem is about different systems of predicates is still a good one, and basically right. The vast literature on anomalous monism and event-identity, though, largely abandoned Davidson’s idea that mis-matching predicate-systems rather than properties were the key to understanding. The central idea in Davidson (1967b and 1967c), that problems of logical
form can be solved by quantifying over something, applies whether or not those somethings are limited to events.

Another reason philosophers abandoned the program was that Davidson paid relatively little attention to developments in linguistic semantics. Thus some of his semantical views seem quaint. He never abandoned the treatment of quantifiers as operators. He continued to think that the truth-functional conditional was all you need to say about “if” even though his own work (Davidson 1970b) showed that that could not be the case with conditional “ought” sentences. But the conception of quantification as operators on open sentences and “if” as a truth-function was inessential for Davidson. Nothing important changes if quantification is regarded as primarily set-theoretic and a better theory of “if” is part of a truth-definitional theory. More generally, the very great progress in linguistics on a variety of topics can, I believe, can be incorporated into an essentially Davidsonian conception of semantics. Part of this incorporation is accomplished just by enforcing Davidson’s very austere notion of what a semantics should be and reclassifying the parts of these linguistic theories that do more than semantics requires as theories associated with predicates. Davidson’s idea was that enough structure should be assigned to a kind of sentence so that a speaker with finite learning capacity could understand infinity of sentences. To assign more structure, for instance to suppose that “is a horse” has a structural element “is an animal,” so that the inference from “Stewball was a horse” to “Stewball was an animal” is formal goes beyond anything that motivates assigning logical forms in the first place. Quine’s idea that logic is indifference to which particular predicates occur, and that everything else is theory, has been lost if semantics does more than it has to.

But the most important reason the program was abandoned is the first one. Philosophers took it as obvious that Davidson had no way of accommodating intuitions about the persistence
of objects or counterfactuals about things that could have happened to Aristotle and Ben Franklin, given his denial of *given* natures in Davidson (1974). It seemed that some kind of objective privilege had to distinguish some predicates from others. A natural understanding was that correspondence to a real division in nature was the basis of that privilege.\(^6\) If a “given” domain of objects is required in order to accommodate some truths, that completely undermines Davidson’s talk of predicates rather than properties and so abandons the entire Quinean-Davidsonian perspective on how to think of questions about what there is.

I argue on the contrary that Davidson’s views on the given are entirely compatible with Kripkean and Aristotelian intuitions about what Aristotle might or might not have turned out to do for a living and every other “metaphysical” intuition. Davidson, given his view that most of what people believe is true, has to have some explanation of these intuitions about the continued existence of medium-sized objects which makes them come out true. Unlike Quine, who is willing to jettison “common sense” in favor of physics, Davidson, at least in principle, has to accommodate common sense. On a number of topics I supply what I think Davidson ought to have said about essentialism, properties, the mind-body problem, properties, and facts. If we discount the residual scientism that Davidson seems to have inherited from Quine, and focus on what someone with Davidson’s views who completed parts of his program and accommodated the truths of common sense might have written, we get the beginnings of the implementation of a program which is Davidsonian, but which differs in a number of respects from the

\(^6\) My 1975 essay applying the Sorites argument was an argument that, if the real objects were those which corresponded to joints in nature, the real objects would be micro-particles. Since the objects of ordinary experience have no determinate relation to micro-particles, they are strictly not real beings.
implementation begun by the actual Davidson, while inspired and shaped by Davidson’s work on these topics. I think I have found what Davidson should have said about why a person can gain weight and continue to exist but not be made into sausage and continue to exist. Chapters 2 and 3 construct an essentialism which is relative to predicates and which treats entities as posits required for thinking rather than articulations of reality.

So, in brief, this book is an attempt to re-launch the Davidson program, adhering to his fundamental insights about semantics, interpretation and predication while differing in many respects from the implementation that Davidson actually produced, accommodating essentialist intuitions and dealing with issues, such as modality, temporal continuants, sorites arguments, ethical concepts, properties, and facts that Davidson never got around to addressing. The book offers the outlines of a Davidsonian account of these topics in some cases, such as the modals, and offers rather complete accounts of others, such as comparative adjectives, including “good.”

This book consists of ten chapters on a wide variety of topics. After the first three chapters, which introduce the essentials of Davidsonian semantics, his account of interpretation, and a view I call “relative essentialism,” the rest of the chapters are outlines of how to continue the Davidsonian program. Not every topic about modality, the philosophy of time, or ethics is dealt with. Rather, the intent is to show how the central Davidsonian insights about predication, interpretation, and the assignment of logical forms can illuminate, solve or dissolve a variety of problems of semantics, ethics, and metaphysics. The conclusion in most of the chapters is that metaphysical theories are unmotivated. There is no need or role for a science which would supplement natural science and common sense about the nature of material objects. The accounts of physics and the natural sciences and the common-sense concepts about medium-sized objects,
organisms, and persons exhaust the real questions. If you are interested in the real nature of time or matter, for instance, ask the physicists. If you wish to know what it takes for Joe to be a frog, there is a simple answer. “Joe is a frog” is true if and only if Joe is a frog. If you want a more detailed answer, consult biologists and read some natural history. That there might be more fundamental questions, deeper than biology, about what has to obtain for the predicate “frog” to be true of an object is a mistake. There just is no “problem of predication.” The mystery of how there can be entities, namely properties, which are the same even though multiply located, disappears when we take seriously the idea in Davidson’s (2005)\(^7\) that there is nothing illuminating to say about predication beyond statements such as “‘Is a frog’ is true of an object just in case that object is a frog.”

The last two chapters are not so much a rejection of metaphysics as a presentation of ways a Davidsonian approach could clarify ethical discussion. An understanding of logical form would allow ethical enquiry to get somewhere, rather than arguing about intuitions. As in the previous chapters, it would be expected that very much excellent work would be, slightly reformulated, a part of an adequate theory.

II The Chapters

Chapter 1 is a discussion and development of Davidsonian principles of semantics as I understand them, focusing on the topics that will come up in succeeding chapters. The crucial

\(^7\) Davidson held this view of predication long before 2005. I called him during the early 2000s and asked him what he was working on. He told me that he was writing an account of predication which for decades he had thought was completely obvious. He said it had only recently dawned on him that not everyone knew that predication was no mystery at all. The view is also implicit in Davidson (1967a), but “implicit” does not entail “understood by most readers.”
parts of Davidson’s view for my purposes are his account of truth and predication, his conception of interpretation as rationalization, and his conception of semantics as distinct from theory. I defend the idea that a disquotational truth-definition is the only proper semantics. Whatever else we know or do not know about what the conditions are for being a pig, we can be sure that “is a pig” is true of an object if and only if that object is a pig. Semantical theories which go beyond disquotation for syntactically simple predicates are properly understood as theories of those objects. Given this austere semantics, interpretation plays a major role in how we understand one another.

Chapter 2 is an appreciation and critique of absolute essentialism, the idea that the world is intrinsically divided up “at the joints” into entities and properties of those entities. It focuses on Aristotle, the philosopher who realized that you cannot posit a kind of object without supposing objective necessities about it, and Kripke, who revived Aristotelian essentialism. It consists of two main arguments: The first argument is that many kinds of entity which we would be reluctant to regard as natural kinds have many of the features of natural kinds. Terms for them are “rigid designators” and their extensions are not determined by conceptual contents. There are things Pepsi and bouillon could be and cannot be which are independent of a person’s conception of them. The second argument is that, from an objective point of view, there is very little reason to take, for instance “has atomic number 79” as an essential property of a stuff. The stuff necessarily has atomic number 79 given that it is gold, but that is not an obvious “given.” The stuff itself could be the same stuff and not be gold. The mere change of a single quark from up to down would make an atom be one or another element. Nothing is special about “elements.”

Chapter 3 presents a view of natures, properties, and beings that accommodates intuitions about persistence without supposing that nature itself is intrinsically articulated. It is a view that...
Davidson could have accepted which accommodates Kripkean\(^8\) intuitions about objects while respecting Davidson’s view that there is no “given” domain of beings, but only different predicate systems. The basic problem for a Davidsonian accommodation of the insights Kripke presents is that Davidson is committed to a view on which there is no “given” domain of objects. Using the material from Chapter 2, I argue for what I call “relative essentialism,” the view that the articulation of reality into beings and properties is a requirement for thought, given that thought must represent sub-sentential formal logical relations among sentences. Thus, in a somewhat Kantian way, positing beings and properties is a precondition for thought. I argue that the happy fact that reality seems to come in beings which have properties is not our conformity to a given articulated world, but rather our doing, in some sense of “us” and “do.” On this understanding, Quine and Davidson are both Kantians, in the sense that they regard the positing of beings as impositions from us, rather than a reflection of an articulation in nature itself.

Positing a kind of object, though, means positing persistence and identity conditions, which generate modal truths about those objects. I argue that Davidson and Quine are implicitly committed to a kind of at least probabilistic essentialism. Given that we posit all sorts of objects, there can be distinct physical objects, each with a kind of essence, occupying the same space at the same time. This does not mean either that there are alternative conceptual schemes or that there are not really chairs and electrons. It does mean that kinds of entity should be thought of on the model of units of length. No one would deny that a hundred yards separates the two goal

\(^8\) These insights accord very well with Aristotle’s views in *Metaphysics* Zeta, Eta and Theta, as noted above. I might remark autobiographically that after hearing Kripke’s lectures, and remembering the Aristotle seminar I took from Terry Penner, I took classical Greek for three years so that I could read Aristotle and understand the secondary literature.
lines on a football field. But few would assert that the field itself is naturally and intrinsically divided into one-yard chunks.

That agents themselves are also posits rather than a given part of the articulation of reality is not a problem. Given that being an agent and thinking of oneself as an agent within the intentional family of concepts is a condition of being a language user, there after all really are for us no global alternative conceptual schemes.

Chapter 4 extends the results of Chapter 3 to the category of events. It argues that distinct events can occur in the same place at the same time, just as distinct physical objects can occupy the same space at the same time. Events of various kinds have (relative) essences, and distinct events of different kinds can occur at the same place and time, even though they have the same causes and effects. This result is applied to Davidson’s (1970a) argument for anomalous monism. The view of the relation of the mental to the physical I propose could be called innocuous dualism.

A discussion of causation urges that facts and states, which are distinct from events, can be referents of verb-phrases and also causes. The core of Davidson’s analysis of adverbs is that something is quantified over to which many predicates are ascribed. This core is independent of the question of what kind of entity is quantified over. Facts and states, properly construed as metaphysically inert constructions out of things said, can perfectly well be quantified over and can perfectly well be arguments of a “cause” predicate. What facts and states are is the topic of Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 is a Davidsonian account of modality and conditionals. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 make extensive use of modal predicates, and an account is called for. The first sections make the obvious adaptation of Davidson’s (1968) account of indirect discourse by treating modals as
predicates of demonstrated things said. While this would be adequate for some special modalities, it will not work for modalities in general. The situation is akin to that with the quantifiers—the extreme quantifiers “all” and “some” can be treated as generalized truth functions, but many others cannot. In particular, conditional modalities such as “ought” and “probably” cannot be treated as a modal applied to a conditional. An account of modality must therefore also be an account of conditionals. I defend the default view of conditionals that “if” is univocal and that “then” is an independent word, so that it is a mistake to treat “if..then” as a single semantic unit. The account of conditionals developed treats “if” as something akin to punctuation indicating first arguments of two-place predicates of things said. In this respect the theory of conditionals is akin to Kratzer’s (2012) account, minus possible worlds and a few other things. The modals “ought” and “should” get further development in Chapter 10.

Chapter 6 is a discussion of properties, propositions and facts. While Davidsonian semantics gives these three sorts of entities no role whatsoever in semantics, they surely exist, given that there are true sentences about them. This chapter supplies an account of what these objects are that makes truths about them come out true. On this account, they are useful posits constructed from utterances, but with no role in semantics. As with the previous chapter, this answer takes as the basis for all three kinds of entities Davidson’s (1968) account of indirect discourse.

Chapter 7 is an illustration of how Davidson’s account of predication and truth, combined with a generalization of the treatment of modality in Chapter 5 and the semantically and metaphysically inert character of Davidsonian properties and facts discussed in Chapter 6, can dissolves metaphysical puzzles. Two ancient metaphysical problems about time are the problem of future contingents and Heraclitus’ problem of accidental intrinsics. This chapter argues that
those puzzles have no force whatsoever without truth-maker semantics and an ontologically and semantically weighty conception of properties and facts. No exciting new logic is called for to allow an open future, and no problem arises from thinking that the very same person is now older than she was.

Chapter 8 is a discussion and resolution of the Sorites paradox, which has been a topic of previous chapters and a long-standing puzzle to me. The Sorites raises a grave difficulty for monistic essentialism, since, if natures of things owe to reality being divided at the joints, and there is only one set of joints, entities which are not reducible to basic entities have no natures. The Sorites thus threatens the reality of medium-sized objects, since it shows that medium-sized objects and their properties cannot be reduced to complexes of micro-particles and their properties. Given that the real joints, if there were such, would be at the micro-particle level, there seems to be no metaphysical basis for thinking medium-sized objects can have natures and so be objects at all.

The Sorites is a main reason to be a relative essentialist rather than a monistic essentialist. The struggles to be a “cut-at-the-joints” realist and have real medium-sized objects and children evaporate with relative essentialism. With relative essentialism, many objects overlap without getting in each other’s way, in something like the way feet, cubits and meters co-exist on the football field. One of the features of the ontological permissiveness allowed by relative essentialism is that most kinds of objects and properties will of course lack sharp definitions in other terms. While the metaphysical issue of how medium-sized objects of the lived world co-exist with micro-particles does not arise for relative essentialism, the logical problem of whether a bivalent logic is appropriate given that it is in principle indeterminable in some cases whether an entity is a pig or not, does.
This chapter therefore offers a kind of pragmatic solution to the problem of what logical system is appropriate for understanding human language. I argue that there is a sense in which every predicate is completely determinate and that bivalence can be accepted on practical grounds.

Chapter 9 is an account of the semantics of sentences using “good.” Davidson said in class in 1967 (Wheeler 2012) that the first thing an ethical theory should look for is an account of the logical form of sentences using “good” and “ought.” Meta-ethical writing almost never does this. Some of the things writers say about “good” contradict basic constraints on what the truth-conditions of sentences using “good” could be. Almost all of the ethical writing about what we ought to do is oblivious to facts about logical form which Davidson (1970b) pointed out long ago.

Whereas values are always part of Davidson’s understanding of interpretation, since he always characterizes “charity of interpretation” in terms of treating others as “believers in the true and lovers of the good,” most discussions of Davidsonian interpretation focus exclusively on agreement in belief. This and the next chapter correct that.

“Good” is a member of a subset of the comparative adjectives with the following features: Such adjectives create intensional contexts, require the inference from “good F” to “F” and have comparatives that are apparently relative to a kind. You can be a better tennis player than I am, but not a better pool player. Nothing like this is possible with normal comparative adjectives such as “tall.” If you are a taller basketball player than I am, you are a taller anything.

The logical form of the broader category of comparative adjectives is itself a topic that has generated hundreds of accounts, a few of which I discuss. Most of those accounts are incompatible with a Davidsonian disquotational semantics. The chapter develops a Davidsonian
account of comparative adjectives, adapting the idea of quantifying over something in Davidson (1967b) and extending that account to cover the odd kind of adjective that “good” is. It offers the beginnings of a theory of “good.”

Chapter 10 is an account of “ought.” This chapter first shows that “ought” and “obligation” are completely different modal notions with different logical characteristics, and diagnoses the confusion most ethical theorists have had since at least the time of Kant. I argue that, while obligations are an important aspect of ethics, “ought” is the fundamental modality of ethical reasoning.

The theory of the truth-conditions of applications of “good” suggested at the end of Chapter 9 connects “good” with “ought.” A good bagel is one you ought to want if you want a bagel. “Ought” was one topic of Chapter 6, on modalities. Whereas that chapter was concerned only with the logical form of sentences using “ought,” this chapter develops a theory of what it takes for a conditional “ought” predicate to apply to a pair of propositions, understood as “things said.”

The theory articulates “ought” as a chain of conditional probabilities; that is “If P then probably Q” sentences. (Wheeler 1975) Those conditional probabilities, in the case of “ought”-sentences about agents, are supported by Davidsonian principles of interpretation. Those principles are normative, in a broad sense. Briefly, if correct interpretation maximizes agreement in beliefs and desires, treating the other agent as a believer of truths and a valuer of the good, then, just as most of the beliefs we hold about pigs are attributed to the other when we interpret one of the other’s predicates as being true of an object if and only if “is a pig” is, so with the valuations we hold regarding pigs. In the simplest cases, this will mean that if a term is correctly
interpreted as meaning “chair,” it will serve interests in the life of the other that chairs serve for us.

Moral and prudential uses of “ought” get analogous treatment. The prudential “ought” applies our concept of rational agency to conditional “ought”-sentences with desires as antecedents. The moral “ought” takes as antecedent “is an agent.”

The ethical theory that comes out of Chapter 10 differs from those current in at least three ways. First, “good” and “ought” are univocal. There is no special moral sense of these words. Rather, moral uses arise from different first arguments of conditional “ought”-sentences. Second, many ethical questions are absolutely undeterminable, since the predicates that generate the meaning of applications of “good” are vague predicates without definitions in other terms. Third, the model of ethical reasoning is induction rather than deduction. “Ought” is taken as the fundamental ethical modality. General principles about what one ought to do can only be guidelines “Obligation” and related predicates are a very distinct family of modals whose logic is deduction. Thus principles, for a Davidsonian, can only be guidelines.

III Thanks

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views. Mike Lynch’s advice much improved the prospectus and this introduction. The publisher’s readers, especially the least enthusiastic of them, made the book much better than it would have been.

Over the past fifteen years, the assembled graduate students and faculty at our department’s weekly Wednesday Brown Bags have heard versions of many of these chapters and have given me much assistance in understanding how anyone could not immediately be convinced that what I am saying is correct. The Logic Group at the University of Connecticut heard early versions of two of the more technical chapters, giving me much helpful feedback.

Two of my graduate students over the past fifteen years have written dissertations showing how parts of the Davidson program have not been shown inadequate after all. Daniel Blair (2003) and Nilanjan Bhowmick (2012), using their vast knowledge of the linguistics literature, have bolstered my confidence that the Davidson program is not dead, but in a kind of suspended animation, thus making it possible to hope that a relaunching is possible.