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The American Point of View

As I noted in the first chapter, the general style of American philosophy during the inter-war period was different from the analytical style then dominant in Britain and Central Europe. During the early post-war period, however, there was a marked turn towards a more analytical style. There were several reasons for this. In part it showed the influence of the distinguished refugees from Central Europe who had arrived during the late 1930s. All over the United States teachers and students of philosophy were exposed at first hand to ideas developed in Vienna, Berlin, and Warsaw through contact with Rudolph Carnap, Carl (Peter) Hempel (1905–1997), Ernest Nagel, Hans Reichenbach, Alfred Tarski, and others. Another influence was contact, direct and indirect, with Moore and Wittgenstein. Moore spent much of the war teaching in the United States and seems to have had a remarkable impact there. Wittgenstein also visited the United States in 1949; although this was a private visit to his friend Norman Malcolm, Malcolm's writings from this period brought Wittgenstein's later ideas to public attention well before the posthumous publication of Wittgenstein's later writings. But the most important development was the emergence of a distinctively American school of philosophy which differentiated itself from both Viennese logical empiricism and British ordinary language philosophy.

The central figure in this development is Willard Van Quine (1908–2000) whose career was based at Harvard. Quine's association with Harvard began in 1930 when he was drawn there by the prospect of studying logic with Russell's famous associate A. N. Whitehead, though to his disappointment he found that Whitehead had by then lost interest in logic. But after completing his Ph.D. he was awarded a travelling fellowship which he used to travel to Central Europe, where he attended meetings of the Vienna Circle and then moved on for 'the

intellectually most rewarding months I have known' ('Autobiography of W. V. Quine', p. 12)—six weeks in Prague, where he discussed philosophy with Carnap, and six further weeks in Warsaw, where he met the great Polish philosopher-logicians Tarski, Lesniewski, and Lukasiewicz. In retrospect the crucial meeting was that with Carnap. Once back in Harvard Quine lectured on Carnap and it was largely thanks to Quine that Carnap himself moved to the USA in 1936.

Quine, however, has been no uncritical disciple of Carnap; on the contrary, Quine made a name for himself precisely by rejecting one of the central points of Carnap's philosophy—the 'analytic/synthetic' distinction. The disagreement was hinted at in Quine's early writings, but only became explicit in Quine's famous 1950 paper 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'. Quine not only separates himself here from Carnap and the tradition of the Vienna Circle; he also sets himself apart from the British tradition of philosophical analysis discussed in the previous chapter. In a review of Strawson's *Introduction to Logical Theory* written at this time Quine picks out for critical comment the fact that Strawson employs a conception of logical implication grounded in the idea of analytic truth, and in criticizing this and the associated conception of conceptual analysis Quine recognises that he is rejecting one of the central ideas of philosophical analysis as practised within the tradition of ordinary language philosophy.

In what follows I shall concentrate on Quine's discussion of this topic; but it should be borne in mind that throughout his career Quine has made substantial contributions to logical theory and in particular to the study of the logical foundations of mathematics. So, very much in the manner of Russell, Quine writes about philosophy as a practising logician.

The Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

The 'analytic/synthetic distinction' applies to 'truths', which Quine takes to be sentences that are unambiguously true (the disambiguation of a sentence such as 'I am hot' required to handle its use by different speakers at different times is broadly equivalent to Strawson's

conception of the statement a speaker makes by uttering such a sentence). Typically the truth of a true sentence depends both on the meaning of the words used and on the state of the world: the truth of the sentence 'Washington DC is the capital of the USA' depends both on the meaning of the words used and on the location of the federal government of the USA. True sentences of this kind are said to be 'synthetic truths'. 'Analytic truths', by contrast, are supposed to be true sentences whose truth depends only on the meanings of the words used.

There are, supposedly, two main types of analytic truth. The first is exemplified by 'all bachelors are unmarried men': in this case it is because the word 'bachelor' means the same as the words 'unmarried man' that the truth of the sentence depends only on the meanings of the words used. But in fact this point about the meaning of the word 'bachelor' implies only that the meaning of the sentence 'all bachelors are unmarried men' is the same as that of 'all unmarried men are unmarried men'. Hence the first is an analytic truth only if the second is one too. This second sentence is an elementary truth of logic, but the fact, if it is one, that its truth depends only on the meanings of the words used is not a consequence of an explicit definition. Instead the meaning of the logical vocabulary in sentences of the form 'all A's are A's' must be such as to guarantee the truth of instances such as 'all unmarried men are unmarried men'. And this in turn rests on the thesis that the principles of logic constitute 'implicit definitions' of the logical vocabulary that occurs within them.

The existence of analytic truths in general therefore depends on the analyticity of logical truths, which Quine rejects along with the extension of the notion of analyticity to embrace non-logical analytic truths via the hypothesis of synonymous expressions. In both cases, Quine argues, supporters of analyticity are mistaken in supposing that there is a well-defined notion of meaning sufficient to guarantee all by itself the truth of sentences. So where upholders of the analytic/synthetic distinction hold that there are these two different kinds of truth, Quine is insistent that all truths are of one and the same kind, dependent both on language and on the state of the world.

By itself this may well seem a rather limited thesis, primarily concerning the meaning of logical vocabulary. But it is indicative of the central position of logic and the philosophy of language within analytical philosophy that Quine's thesis necessitates a reconsideration of the very idea of analytical philosophy. Indeed a first thought here will be that if there are no *analytic* truths, then there is no possibility of logical *analysis* and nothing worth describing as *analytical* philosophy. This, however, is incorrect: it depends on the assumption that the truths of logic are analytic, which Quine rejects. As a logician himself, Quine does not deny the importance of logic to philosophy in virtue of its central role in articulating our practices of reasoning; and he also recognizes that logic induces what he calls a 'regimentation' of ordinary language which, by assigning a logical role to different elements of language, constitutes a logical analysis of it. Thus Quine denies neither the possibility of logical analysis nor the philosophical significance of such analyses; indeed his writings are full of logical analyses. What Quine does deny is that such logical analyses are analytic truths, true merely in virtue of meaning; instead he holds that they differ only in generality from chemical analyses, which no one would think of as analytic truths.

It is easy to lose a sense of historical perspective on this issue, and it is therefore worth recalling that throughout the first decade of the twentieth century when Russell was at his most creative he also held that truths of logic are synthetic, not analytic. The shift to a conception of logical truth as analytic came about primarily because of its presentation by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (though Wittgenstein had himself been influenced by Frege's earlier adoption of this view). Russell was among those persuaded by Wittgenstein of the analyticity of logic, and during the 1920s this thesis became a standard element of the position of those whom we now classify as analytical philosophers, such as the Viennese logical empiricists. Among those was of course Carnap, and his position is worth special attention because of the special relationship between Quine and Carnap.

As I explained in Chapter 1 (p. 6) Carnap held that philosophy is just logical analysis. He also held that logic is analytic. For, drawing on Wittgenstein's discussion of logic in the *Tractatus*, he held that the truths of logic are a by-product of the meaning of the language we use

for the purposes of reasoning and calculation. This was important to him because of the way in which it explains the fact that it strikes us that the truths of logic are necessary and that our knowledge of them is 'a priori' (i.e. does not require justification on the basis of observation). Empiricists have always found these features of logic difficult to accommodate since they hold that our understanding of the world is to be justified on the basis of observation alone. If, however, logic is analytic then someone who understands a logical truth is in a position to recognize its truth without needing to obtain further information about the state of the world; so an empiricist like Carnap who holds that logic is analytic can allow that a priori knowledge of their truth is possible. Likewise, since their analyticity implies that they are true however the world might turn out to be, it also implies their necessity.

The correspondence between these three distinctions—(i) the *semantic* analytic/synthetic distinction; (ii) the *metaphysical* necessary/contingent distinction; and (iii) the *epistemological* a priori/empirical distinction—with the semantic distinction providing a basis for the others, is a central feature of Carnap's logical empiricism, and manifests clearly a conception of analytical philosophy according to which priority is to be assigned to semantic (linguistic) considerations in resolving metaphysical and epistemological issues. One possible line of criticism here is that these distinctions do not match up as neatly as is here supposed. Kant famously argued that there are synthetic a priori truths, and, as we shall see in Chapter 6, from the 1970s onwards there have been powerful arguments in favour of the existence of necessary empirical truths and of contingent a priori truths. But these points should be bracketed here, for Quine at least agrees with Carnap that the distinctions do match up much as he supposes. His disagreement is just that he holds that there are no analytic truths; so he also holds that there are no a priori truths and no necessary truths, at least of the kind envisaged in traditional metaphysics (cf. Chapter 6, pp. 121–2). Thus he rejects Carnap's conception of analytical philosophy as providing a new 'linguistic' way of fulfilling the traditional philosophical tasks of articulating the a priori structure of knowledge and the necessary structure of being. Instead, he subscribes to a thorough-going empiricist naturalism

while remaining committed to the merits of logical analysis; his position is one of analytical empiricism without analytic truths.

Quine is by no means the first philosopher to have criticized the conception of analytic truth. At the start of the twentieth century, for example, the British idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846–1924) rejected it in the light of his thorough-going 'monism' according to which all truths are in the end connected as elements within the one ultimate Absolute reality. For this is incompatible with the thesis that there are some truths which stand apart from others as true merely in virtue of their meaning. But although there are similarities between Bradley's idealist monism and Quine's 'holism' (which I explain below), there is no doubt that in the twentieth century it is Quine's empiricist critique of analyticity that was the most important.

Quine's Criticisms of Analyticity

As one would expect, Quine has one line of argument against the narrow analyticity of logical truths, what he calls 'the linguistic theory of logical truth', and a different one against the broader conception which draws on synonymies, though both begin from the demand that there be some empirical substance to the notion of meaning which the supporter of analyticity invokes.

In considering the case of logical truths Quine begins by accepting two points which supporters of their analyticity bring forward: first, that those who disagree over the acceptability of some alleged logical truth (such as the law of excluded middle that all sentences of the form '*A* or not *A*' are true) disagree over the meaning of the logical vocabulary involved (usually the word 'not' in this case); secondly, the fact that if we find an anthropologist maintaining that some 'primitive' people have a 'pre-logical' mentality which tolerates explicit contradictions, we will conclude that the anthropologist has mistranslated the native language.

These points appear to imply that the logical truths in question are true merely in virtue of the meaning of these words. Quine, however, urges that this last step does not follow. There is, he thinks, a simpler

and better explanation of the phenomena—namely that the truths in question are just so obvious that we are bound to regard disagreement or deviance as overwhelmingly good evidence for some misunderstanding, just as we would also conclude there must be some misunderstanding of the language if a person with normal eyesight and a good view of the sky on a clear sunny day rejected the sentence 'the sky is blue today', which no one would suppose to be an analytic truth. Thus, for Quine, the thesis of the analyticity of logical truths is a gratuitous, and empirically unwarranted addition to the connection between the obviousness of logic and the fact that disagreement concerning obvious truths is proof of misunderstanding.

This claim is not persuasive: the persistence of disagreements from the time of the ancient Greeks to the present day concerning the law of excluded middle undermines any suggestion that its truth is obvious. Nonetheless, these disagreements still appear to be based on disagreements about the meaning of logical terminology. This point is not, however, fatal to Quine's position. For it turns out that his critical discussion of the broader conception of analyticity which depends on the existence of synonymous expressions leads into a more substantial objection to the thesis that logic is analytic.

The starting point of this discussion is the demand that there be some empirical content to the hypotheses concerning synonymy which the defender of analyticity advances. One immediate suggestion here will be that words have the same meaning when they apply to the same things. Quine rightly observes, however, that this suggestion would be disastrous for the analyticity theorist. Thus, to take an example from medieval discussions, human beings are the only featherless animals which walk on two feet ('featherless bipeds'); but no analyticity theorist would want to conclude that 'all and only humans are featherless bipeds' is an analytic truth, dependent only on the meanings of the words 'human being' and 'featherless biped'. So although words with the same meaning must apply to the same things, some further refinement is required if one is to separate the analytic from the synthetic, and if this refinement is to show the legitimacy of the notion of analyticity it must not draw on considerations of necessity and suchlike whose legitimacy is supposed to be vindicated by reference to analyticity.

Quine takes it that, for empiricists at least, this further refinement will be that terms are synonymous where their use is such that whatever counts as observational evidence for or against one is similarly evidence for or against the other. This produces the right negative result in the case of 'human being' and 'featherless biped', since the kinds of evidence that would confirm that something is a human being clearly exceed those that would confirm its being a featherless animal that walks on two feet. The question that he raises, however, is whether any putative analytic truths are such that their constituent terms pass this test, which I shall call the test of 'empirical synonymy'; and his claim is that nothing does pass this test.

His argument for this thesis starts from a thesis advanced by the French historian and philosopher of science Pierre Duhem (1861–1916). Duhem argued that the role of observation and experiment in science is misunderstood by those who think that observations and experiments can be by themselves decisive in refuting scientific hypotheses. For these hypotheses only imply predictions concerning the outcome of experiments and observations given further 'auxiliary' hypotheses. For example, current hypotheses concerning the amount of dark matter in the universe only imply predictions concerning the observable behaviour of galaxies given the current theory of gravitation and assumptions about the amount of matter which is not dark; furthermore, our observations of the behaviour of galaxies themselves draw on many auxiliary hypotheses about the significance of the observable distribution of stars within galaxies, not to mention those literally built into the scientific equipment employed.

Within the philosophy of science Duhem's thesis is widely accepted and taken to imply a 'holistic' doctrine, to the effect that scientific theories, including the associated auxiliary hypotheses involved in testing them, face the 'tribunal of experience' as wholes. For where a prediction fails, Duhem's thesis implies that scientists always confront a variety of alternative explanations of this failure—all the way from rejection of their theoretical postulates to the diagnosis of a fault in their experimental equipment. Some philosophers hold, however, that even if Duhem's thesis applies to prediction and explanation within the theoretical natural sciences, it does not apply generally, since in normal

life we distinguish between more and less authoritative types of evidence, between 'criteria' and 'symptoms', to use Wittgenstein's terms (cf. Chapter 3, p. 28). I shall discuss this line of thought in the next chapter, but for now I shall follow Quine in accepting that Duhem's thesis does apply generally to reasoning which involves empirical evidence.

One important implication of Duhem's thesis is that it is not possible to provide a verificationist analysis of the meaning of a 'theoretical' sentence, a sentence which does not straightforwardly describe something observable, in terms of sentences which describe the kinds of observation which would verify or refute the sentence in question, since any such analysis would imply that there are suitable observations which can by themselves refute the truth of the sentence. Yet there is no reason to hold that the idea of analytic truth itself brings with it a commitment to the possibility of such analyses. Someone who holds that one can analyse the meaning of 'bachelor' as 'unmarried man' need not hold that it is a simple matter of observation whether someone is unmarried. So, on the face of it, acceptance of Duhem's thesis need not commit one to rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction.

In 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' Quine begins by distinguishing the two 'dogmas' he has in mind, the analytic/synthetic distinction and the idea of a verificationist analysis of meaning. Having argued that the idea of verificationist analysis is untenable in the light of Duhem's thesis, however, he goes on to maintain that this also refutes the analytic/synthetic distinction since 'The two dogmas are, indeed, at root identical' (p. 41). This is a puzzling claim. The combination of an analytic/synthetic distinction with explicit acceptance of Duhem's thesis, was, as Quine must have known perfectly well, the position of Carnap in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934; Quine helped with its English translation in 1937 and I suspect that it was from Carnap that he learnt of Duhem). So why did Quine think that this combination was untenable? Quine's reasoning at this point is, unfortunately, obscure. But the explanation of Quine's claim, I think, is that he latched onto Carnap's acknowledgement in this book that the truth of even what are supposed to be analytic truths may turn out to require revision in the light of experience. I shall return to some of the details of

Carnap's complex treatment of this matter, but on the face of it, this admission is tantamount to an abandonment of the traditional conception of analyticity. For if experience might suggest to us that not all bachelors are unmarried men, then the truth that all bachelors are unmarried men does not simply depend on the meaning of the words involved but depends also on how the world is discovered to be.

Carnap's acknowledgment is, in effect, an extension of Duhem's thesis. For Duhem, a scientist who finds the observational predictions of his theoretical postulates unfulfilled has a variety of ways of revising his beliefs to accommodate the apparently recalcitrant observations, all the way from changing his mind about what was actually observed to revising his theoretical postulates. What Quine takes from Carnap is an admission that previously unquestioned analytic rules, which govern both the structure of the fundamental concepts and the underlying logic and mathematics, are also available for revision. The resulting position, that nothing, *including* putative conceptual truths, logic, and mathematics, is immune from revision in the light of experience, is now widely known as the Quine–Duhem thesis; and it is from the perspective of this revised thesis that the two dogmas show themselves as 'at root identical'.

It is, then, this extension of Duhem's thesis which lies at the heart of Quine's objection to the conception of analytic truth, to the idea that there is a domain of truths that are insulated from empirical inquiries because their truth has already been established by their meaning. This thesis clearly poses a challenge to the supposed analyticity of logic and mathematics as well as to the broader analyticity of truths which rest on synonymies and conceptual connections. But is it true, first, that mathematics and logic are revisable in the light of experience? One can point to the development of non-Euclidean geometries during the nineteenth century, and then to the use of one of them, Riemann's, in physical theory during the twentieth century. But the defender of analyticity can observe that even though Euclidean geometry was long held to be a priori, no one has ever thought that it was analytic. Quine also brings up the suggestion that some standard principles of logic should be abandoned in order to resolve puzzles within quantum theory. Yet this case is also not persuasive: although the resulting

'quantum logic' is of considerable algebraic interest, it commands no support among physicists. Contemporary debates concerning quantum theory certainly do include some weird hypotheses, but they do not involve any challenge to logic or mathematics. In truth, where there are serious disputes concerning logical principles these disputes do not arise from empirical inquiries. They arise either from disagreements about the right way to give an account of meaning of logical terminology (as we shall see in the next chapter); or from disagreements about the relative weight to be attached to considerations of overall simplicity as opposed to sensitivity to intuitive judgements (as applies in the Russell–Strawson debate about descriptions discussed in the previous chapter).

The case for supposing that logic and (pure) mathematics are revisable in the light of empirical inquiry remains, therefore, at best unproved. There are, however, better reasons for supposing that putative synonymies and conceptual connections should be regarded as revisable in the light of experience. Quine's colleague at Harvard, Hilary Putnam (1926–), offered the example of the changes in our understanding of mass and other fundamental physical properties consequent upon the shift from Newtonian physics to the Theory of Relativity. There are indeed many cases where the etymology of words reveals long-abandoned beliefs—the planets were once the wandering stars, atoms were once the indivisible elements of matter, oxygen was supposed to be the distinctive feature of acids, responsible for their sharp taste; and so on.

The existence of these cases is undeniable; their significance remains disputable. According to Quine and Putnam they show that experience can motivate us to modify our beliefs in unpredictable ways, and that we have, therefore, good reason not to seek to identify some core implications of a term as definitive, or analytic. Putnam nicely captured the resulting account of meaning by describing it in terms of the existence of 'cluster concepts'—concepts whose identity rests on their role in a network ('cluster') of connections which collectively give the terms involved their meaning, but which are such that any element of the network can be revised in the light of empirical inquiry. For Putnam the fact that all significant concepts are in this way 'cluster concepts' is the important truth of Quine's critique of analyticity.

The intuitive response to Quine and Putnam is that these are cases of a change of meaning motivated by empirical discoveries which show that the concepts previously employed do not fit the phenomena. So it is not that what were supposed to be analytic truths are found in the light of experience to have been synthetic falsehoods all along; instead, even though the old words are retained, their old meanings, with their analytic truths, are abandoned as inapplicable and replaced by new ones. The most influential development of this position is, not surprisingly, that by Carnap, in his 1950 paper 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology'. Carnap suggests here that questions about analyticity should be set in the context of debates about the merits of 'linguistic frameworks' or 'languages', by which Carnap means ways of describing some subject-matter, such as physics or astrology (and not languages such as English and German). Each such language, he holds, includes analytic rules which provide a calculus for reasoning and a conceptual framework for describing its subject-matter. Such descriptions provide answers to 'internal' questions by applying the analytic rules of the language to the results of observation or calculation, though Carnap again endorses Duhem's thesis: the analytic rules do not dictate how internal questions are to be answered in the light of experience. Distinct from these internal questions, however, are 'external' questions concerning the merits and defects of a language, and it is in the context of these latter questions that analytic rules themselves become answerable to experience. Where experience shows that the language works poorly, in that it neglects distinctions, similarities, or possibilities which we have discovered we need to allow for, there is good reason to revise the analytic rules and thus the meaning of the language.

Quine's response to Carnap was that just as there are no purely analytic truths, there are no purely external questions; Carnap's external/internal distinction is just another form of the old analytic/synthetic distinction. Although this response manifests Quine's disagreement with Carnap, it does not provide any independent reason for rejecting Carnap's position. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that their subsequent debates on this subject were entirely inconclusive. In practice, most American philosophers have taken Quine's side, whereas most British philosophers have continued the tradition of conceptual

analysis. As I see it, the issue here is one of substantiating, with Carnap, our intuitive sense that there is a distinction between an 'external' change in the meaning of a term and an 'internal' change of belief concerning the things to which the term applies, instead of accepting Quine's sceptical insistence that there is no substance to this distinction. I shall return to this at the end of this chapter.

Empiricism Naturalized

Quine's commitment to empiricism was a key premiss of his criticisms of analyticity. Another element of these criticisms was his Duhem-inspired holism, and this leads him to an important reinterpretation of empiricism. For he comes to see that there cannot be a sharp distinction between an account of the reasons we have for our beliefs and the understanding of our cognitive abilities with which the natural sciences provide us. Just as philosophical claims about meaning require empirical substantiation, so do philosophical claims about the justification of belief, and this leads him to reinterpret empiricism as a form of 'naturalism'. This is another feature of his philosophy that has been of enormous influence, especially in North America, where, thanks to Dewey, the term 'naturalism' has long had a positive resonance.

For Quine, to be a naturalist in philosophy is to repudiate the aspiration of those philosophers who have held that it is a proper task of philosophy to provide what in the Aristotelian tradition is called a 'first philosophy'—namely a demonstration of the validity of scientific methods of inquiry which does not draw on truths established within the natural sciences themselves. Quine holds instead that philosophical inquiries, including those into the legitimacy of scientific methods, always take place within an understanding of ourselves and the world provided by the sciences. This may seem to promise only a circular procedure of justification; but Quine argues that there is no better alternative and that the circularity is not vicious.

His argument for the first point is simply that the traditional epistemology of those who aspire for a first philosophy has, in fact, simply

led to a sceptical denial that we possess any knowledge: 'the Humean predicament is the human predicament' ('Epistemology Naturalized': 72) as Quine once put it, drawing on the old interpretation of Hume as a sceptic (though, ironically, most scholars would now emphasize Hume's own 'naturalism' through which he mitigates his sceptical conclusions by an appeal to our natural, involuntary, propensity to unreflective belief in those matters upon which ordinary life depends). By itself this unargued claim may not be persuasive; but, as I have indicated, Quine's position does fit with the systematic holism to which he is antecedently committed.

The reason Quine gives for supposing that this position does not undermine any worthwhile epistemology is that although our beliefs form a network, there is sufficient redundancy among the connections between them to enable us to examine critically one group of beliefs without compromising all the rest. Quine likes to employ Neurath's picture of our situation: we are like sailors at sea who cannot take their ship into a dry dock but can replace leaking planks one at a time, and in this way keep the boat afloat. The dry dock option is the aspiration of those 'cosmic exiles' who seek for a first philosophy. This is unrealizable, but, because our beliefs interconnect in a variety of ways, it is possible for us to undertake a piecemeal critical appraisal of them while still retaining reasons for supposing that our understanding of the world and ourselves is broadly correct.

In his paper 'Epistemology Naturalized' (1969), however, Quine seemed to suggest that the result of naturalizing epistemology amounts to its replacement by cognitive psychology. Since this would involve the substitution of causal questions concerning the origin of our beliefs for normative ones concerning their justification, it would lead to the annihilation, rather than the naturalization, of epistemology. In more recent writings (such as *The Pursuit of Truth*, 1990), however, Quine has made it clear that this was not his intention: instead, the normative project of justification and criticism is indeed to continue, but placed within the context of an understanding of ourselves and the world provided by the natural sciences. As we shall now see, Quine nonetheless draws on this naturalization of epistemology to argue for conclusions that are not just subversive of a philosophical tradition, as was

characteristic of his critique of analyticity, but threatening to some of our most deep-rooted beliefs about ourselves.

The Indeterminacy of Translation

Quine's rejection of analyticity rested upon empiricist scepticism concerning the notion of meaning employed, especially that of sameness of meaning within a language, i.e. synonymy. In *Word and Object* (1960) he turned his attention to the question of sameness of meaning across different languages, i.e. translation. But whereas in the first case he argued that the existence of synonyms cannot be substantiated at all once one considers the ways in which our beliefs are revisable in the light of experience, in the second case he allows that translation is often possible, but then argues that where it is possible it can always be achieved in a variety of ways which are, on a sentence by sentence basis, incompatible, even though they are nonetheless equally good overall. Thus in this case the sceptical challenge arises from the fact that too many meanings (translations) are available, whereas before the problem was that none are (because there are no synonyms). This appears paradoxical at first; but different standards for sameness of meaning are in play. In effect Quine is now arguing that, starting from an empirically legitimate, but coarse and holistic, conception of the translation of a language, one cannot refine a precise conception of the meaning of a sentence of the kind which we would need to vindicate judgements of synonymy.

Quine puts his naturalized empiricism to work in presenting this argument through a typically philosophical thought-experiment, in which he imagines a linguist who finds a previously unknown community, and then undertakes with unlimited resources the project of 'radical translation', the project of translating utterances by members of this alien community into her home tongue. Quine's naturalized empiricism implies that her translation should be based on a scientific understanding of the processes underlying alien linguistic behaviour, including an understanding of the stimuli which prompt utterances. When Quine first developed his thought-experiment he thought that

this was unproblematic in principle: all the linguist needed to do was to identify that aspect of the perceptible environment (e.g. the visible presence of a rabbit) to which the alien's utterance was a response and mark that down as the 'stimulus meaning' of the utterance. In more recent writings Quine has argued that this is too simple and that it is necessary to adjust his position somewhat. I shall explain this adjustment later, and suggest why it is not altogether congenial to his naturalized empiricism; for the moment we can stay with the earlier conception of stimulus meaning.

For Quine, discernment of these stimulus meanings constitutes the empirical basis for the linguist's translation of the alien language. But whereas the translation of 'observation sentences' which describe what is being observed (once tentatively identified by the linguist as such) follows directly from an identification of their stimulus meaning, the translation of other sentences inevitably involves assumptions about the preferences and beliefs of alien speakers in ways which makes it inappropriate for the linguist to take the stimulus meaning of their utterance as a sufficient basis by itself for their translation. For example, if the linguist comes to think that the aliens sometimes talk about the past, translation of these sentences cannot simply amount to identifying the heterogeneous collection of stimuli which prompt their utterance. Instead translation will require the linguist to impute to alien speakers beliefs about the connections between present evidence and past events. Thus the linguist's situation is one to which Duhem's thesis about the role of 'auxiliary hypotheses' is directly applicable: when a question from the linguist based upon a tentative translation of a sentence which is not an observation sentence does not prompt the expected response from an alien, the linguist always faces a choice between revising her translation or modifying her beliefs about the alien's underlying beliefs and preferences.

For this reason, Quine argues, translation is inherently 'underdetermined' by the linguist's procedures; there will be more than one scheme of translation that fits the evidence, the observed stimulus meanings. The only constraint is that each translation-scheme, with its own package of imputed beliefs, preferences and other attitudes, should account overall for the pattern of observed stimulus meanings and

associated behaviour. By making compensating adjustments within a system of translation and imputed beliefs and preferences, different schemes can be constructed which fit the observed stimulus meanings equally well however much data is collected.

It is essential to grasp that the resulting variety of possible translations is not supposed to be just the familiar phenomenon of alternative, and only partly adequate, attempts to accommodate linguistically idiosyncratic idioms such as one finds in attempts to translate poetry; nor is it just an implication of the vagueness inherent in much of our language; nor, again, is it a reflection of the difficulty of translation where one language draws distinctions that another does not. Quine misleads his readers by representing the aliens as 'natives' who live in the 'jungle'; instead the aliens should be assumed to live in an environment that is, objectively, precisely similar to ours. For even in the most apparently straightforward case, Quine holds that there will be different but equally good schemes of translation which involve substantively different translations of individual utterances—'utterly disparate translations . . . each of which would be excluded by the other system of translation. Two such translations might even be patently contrary in truth' (*Word and Object*, pp. 73–4).

This argument—the 'argument from above'—draws on holistic connections between the translation of utterances and the imputation of beliefs and preferences. Quine has in fact placed most weight on another argument—'the argument from below'—which concerns the relationship between translation of whole sentences and translation of the words they contain: the claim is that translation of sentences does not uniquely determine translation of the words they contain. Quine's uses his famous example of the utterance 'Gavagai' to suggest this point. He assumes that this can be regarded as a one-word observation sentence whose minimal translation into English, on the basis of its stimulus meaning, is 'Lo, rabbit!', and then invites us to consider whether a fuller translation should be: 'Look: there are some rabbits here' (which would imply that the use of 'Gavagai' involves our ordinary conception of rabbits); or 'Look: there is some rabbit here' (which would imply that 'Gavagai' is used as a mass term comparable to 'beef'); or even 'Look: it is rabbiting here' (which would imply that 'Gavagai' occurs as verb comparable to 'raining' and indicates that the presence of rabbits is thought of as an event comparable to a shower of rain). Quine maintains that each of these translations is tenable as long as it is accompanied by suitable similar translations of related parts of the language; hence, he concludes, in this respect also translation is radically underdetermined.

For two reasons, this example is not persuasive. Firstly, there are obvious syntactic differences between nouns such as 'rabbit', mass terms such as 'beef', and verbs such as 'to rain'; in particular, as Gareth Evans showed, they enter into patterns of inference in different ways. So Quine's linguist with unlimited resources should be able to identify from the observed patterns of speech and inference involving 'Gavagai' which translation is to be preferred. Secondly, if, for some reason, this procedure does not resolve the matter, the significance of the example is only that in this respect the use of ordinary language does not determine a precise conception of the metaphysics of substance. This is not a radical objection to the possibility of translation, but only a reminder that in some respects metaphysics goes beyond common sense.

There are other ways to fill out the argument from below, though they too are difficult to develop in persuasive detail. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the argument from below is supported by that of the argument from above. For the precise translation of a speaker's words brings with it the imputation of beliefs and other attitudes; hence if the ascription of beliefs and attitudes is underdetermined, the translation of his words should be likewise underdetermined.

However that may be, the conclusion, in my view primarily supported by the argument from above, is that translation is in principle underdetermined. Quine infers from this that translation is essentially indeterminate—i.e. he converts the epistemological pluralism of his undertermination thesis into a metaphysical scepticism to the effect that there is nothing beyond, or behind, the plurality of equally good translations: there is, as he famously put it, no 'objective matter to be right or wrong about' (*Word and Object*, p. 73). And since, for Quine, language is not just a vehicle for the expression of antecedent thoughts but is the very accomplishment of thoughts whose content is given by the sentences which express it, indeterminacy of translation brings with it

indeterminacy concerning the identity of the thoughts expressed. There is, again, no 'objective matter to be right or wrong about' as to whether the aliens are having a thought which fits, along with one way of thinking about the world, one translation of a sentence they have uttered or the different thought which fits a different translation, along with its different way of thinking about the world. So indeterminacy of translation implies a radically sceptical doctrine concerning the mind, to the effect that thoughts are not objective elements of the world.

Quine's thesis applies not only to previously unknown speakers, the aliens imagined in the thought experiment of radical translation, but equally to close neighbours with whom we feel entirely familiar, and even to ourselves. For if there is no objective matter as to what the aliens are saying and thinking, there is equally no objective matter as to what our friends and family are saying and thinking, nor even as to what we ourselves are saying and thinking. The alienness of the aliens in Quine's thought experiment is merely a temporary artifice of exposition. At this point it is hard to overcome a sense of vertigo, hard indeed not to feel that Quine has driven us out of our comfortable common-sense conception of meaning into a nightmare in which we find ourselves babbling meaninglessly in a void. But of course if Quine has done this to us, then he has equally done it to himself. Quine likes to contrast his robust realism concerning physics with his scepticism concerning meanings and thoughts; but his scepticism implies that the meaning of any physical theory is itself indeterminate. Indeed his indeterminacy thesis applies to his own statement of it.

In thinking about the indeterminacy thesis an initial issue is that of its relationship to his discussion of analyticity. Quine has observed that the indeterminacy concerning the reference of words such as 'Gavagai' implied by his argument from below goes beyond his earlier position which, while sceptical about meaning, encouraged the view that reference was empirically well-grounded; and many others have felt that the later thesis of the indeterminacy of translation involves a more general degree of scepticism concerning meaning than was implied by the early rejection of synonymy. But in fact the later thesis was implicit in the earlier one. For determinacy of translation implies the possibility of synonymy: if translation is determinate, the possibility of synonymy is

implied as a special case of 'translation' within a language. Hence, if synonymy is not possible, translation must be inherently indeterminate. This implication is in fact clear in Quine's claim in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (p. 43) that 'it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement'. For this is a formulation of the scepticism characteristic of the later indeterminacy thesis.

Despite these connections between his early and later positions, it is no surprise that the overt scepticism of the later position has attracted most critics. Some (most notably Chomsky) have focused on Quine's inference from the empirical underdetermination of translation to the objective indeterminacy of meaning. For, they observe, in the case of physics Quine rejects the analogous inference from the underdetermination of theory to intrinsic indeterminacy. Quine's defence of this selectivity is that realism with respect to physical entities is internal to physical theory, since physical theory purports to explain observed phenomena by reference to real, though often unobservable, physical structures; but no such realism with respect to meanings is presupposed by the enterprise of radical translation. Quine's linguist seeks to make sense of the alien language, but her project does not commit her to supposing that alien linguistic behaviour is to be accounted for by reference to a domain of real meanings which her translations capture more or less adequately. Instead meanings are at best the outcome of successful translation; they are not presupposed by it.

Quine's critics respond that this position just assumes behaviourism and does not do justice to the structure of explanations in psychology and linguistics which have realist presuppositions comparable to those of physics. It is not possible to resolve this issue here, though related questions concerning the nature of psychological explanation will be discussed in Chapter 9. Instead of taking this matter further, therefore, I want to concentrate on a different criticism of Quine's argument.

This concerns Quine's tendency to concentrate exclusively on behavioural evidence ('stimulus meanings'). The objection here is that Quine's thought-experiment draws on a presumption comparable to that characteristic of the 'first philosophy' he himself repudiates. When we seek to legitimate our knowledge of the natural world, Quine holds that it is vain to stand altogether outside the conception of ourselves

and the world which we learn from the natural sciences. But when attempting to legitimate our understanding of each other, he appears to suggest that the only kind of understanding worth having is one that can be reconstructed from the external point of view of a linguist confronting some aliens and drawing only upon the natural sciences. But once we model our understanding of each other on the metaphor of the sailors already at sea on Neurath's boat, we should think of ourselves as already presuming that we share a common world with others, including common standards of rationality.

It seems to me that this point is basically correct and that it undermines the key argument from above for the underdetermination of translation. We have to be persuaded by this argument that there can be distinct schemes of translation which provide a basis for equally good translations of indefinitely extensible and varied types of linguistic evidence, and for equally good explanations of similarly varied types of behavioural evidence. This hypothesis goes beyond Duhem's considerations by demanding that the merits of alternative translations should withstand empirical inquiry in the light of indefinitely extended trials, whereas Duhem's considerations imply only that, in any particular case, there are alternative ways of coping with unfulfilled predictions. And it is here that the point above concerning Neurath's boat can be applied. For once we take it that the linguist can regard the aliens as thinkers like herself, with broadly comparable standards of rationality, our ordinary experience of correcting our misunderstandings of each other gives us every reason to expect that a linguist with unlimited time and resources should be able to discriminate between alternative translations.

No doubt, even after one scheme of translation has proven itself, an alternative scheme can remain 'in principle' defensible thanks to increasingly fantastic auxiliary hypotheses concerning alien systems of beliefs and preferences; paranoid systems of belief, and the 'erotomania' of those who persist in thinking that the object of their obsessive affections returns their feelings show how it is possible to persist with unwarranted interpretations of others. But this should pose no more threat to our certainty that we broadly understand one another than the 'in principle' defensibility of the hypothesis that the earth is flat. In both cases, as thinkers already at sea in the boat of knowledge, we can legitimately dismiss alternatives that would require us to completely rethink our understanding of ourselves and the world just because, from the abstract detached perspective of a 'cosmic exile', these alternatives cannot be decisively refuted. We have no more reason to think, from within our ongoing understanding of the social world, that the merits of alternative translations can be indefinitely sustained in the light of inquiry than we have to think, from within our ongoing understanding of the natural world, that the merits of alternative physical hypotheses can be indefinitely sustained in the light of inquiry. Nothing in Quine's arguments shows that the two cases are not parallel.

Indeterminacy Reinterpreted and Naturalism Revised

Quine's argument for the indeterminacy of translation is, therefore, unpersuasive. This conclusion does not show, however, that the argument is unimportant. For one can reinterpret it as a *reductio ad absurdum* of epistemology naturalized, in the sense that an epistemology restricted to the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences is shown to be incompetent to provide an account of our understanding of language and psychology. Quine's argument suggests instead that epistemology needs to be 'humanized' as well as naturalized, in the sense that it should incorporate an antecedent commitment to our normal standards of rationality and understanding of each other.

As several critics have observed, the dialectical situation here is comparable to that which arises in connection with Wittgenstein's rule-following argument; indeed the alleged underdetermination of translation resembles Wittgenstein's suggestion that, given a certain conception of rule-following, deviants cannot be excluded. Wittgenstein does not use his argument to establish a sceptical conclusion concerning meaning, but to show the need for a conception of 'blind' rule-following which is sustained by the practice of language-games that are normally communal. Similarly, therefore, Quine's argument should be used, not to establish the sceptical conclusion he

himself seeks to draw, but to show the need for the humanization of epistemology.

Although this suggestion (which I have adapted from some of Davidson's writings which I discuss in the next chapter) amounts to a reinterpretation of the significance of Quine's indeterminacy argument, it turns out to fit well with an important change in his own position. The reason for this change concerns the account to be given of the 'stimulus meaning' of sentences. Quine argued that since the utterance of a sentence is in fact prompted by excitation of the speaker's sensory receptors, it is just the pattern of the relevant excitation of the speaker's receptors (the 'proximal stimulus') which should, strictly speaking, be identified as its stimulus meaning, and not the feature of the external environment (the 'distal stimulus') which is causally responsible for this excitation. As Quine notes, this implies that sentences uttered by different speakers differ in their stimulus meanings, which appears to undermine any basis for a common understanding of language.

Quine's way out of this solipsist impasse into which his thoroughgoing naturalism led him is remarkable: he invokes the hypothesis of an original 'empathy' between speakers, whereby each imaginatively puts himself or herself inside the other's skin in order to identify the appropriate translation of the other's utterance—i.e. a sentence that they would assent to in the speaker's situation. In effect, therefore, the notion of stimulus meaning is abandoned, and in its place Quine relies on an original empathy through which we are to regard ourselves as living in a shared world concerning whose obvious features we should presume that we are in agreement with others.

This invocation of empathy, whose merits play an absolutely central role in his late philosophy, appears to be a case of the late conversion of a sinner to the cause of the a priori. Furthermore it cannot be regarded as inherent in the naturalization of epistemology; the thesis that we can find out what others mean by imaginatively identifying with them is no part of the methodology of the natural sciences. On the contrary, it is an admission of the need for the humanization of epistemology; and once it is employed, the grounds for accepting the indeterminacy thesis are removed. For empathy is, in effect, precisely the presumption of a shared world which will in principle enable a radical translator to find reasons for preferring one translation of an alien language over others.

It is important, however, to recognize that an 'empathetic' understanding of the language of others does not necessarily bring with it the kind of 'sympathetic' understanding of them which enables us to feel close to them. Wittgenstein put this point in a nice passage which provides a final comment on Quine's argument:

> We also say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. (*PI* II. xi. p. 223)

Analyticity Reconsidered

How, finally, do things stand on the issue of analyticity? I have suggested that once we humanize our epistemology, there are no reasons of principle why we should not be able to settle on translations of the language of others that are as determinate as considerations of context and of the vagueness of language allow. Since the indeterminacy of translation was implied by the rejection of analyticity, it follows that the considerations of shared rationality inherent in the humanization of epistemology should provide grounds for mitigating Quine's rejection of analyticity.

In 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' Quine provides a starting point for thinking about this when he writes of the 'recalcitrant' experiences which prompt us to revise our beliefs. For recalcitrance is inconsistency, and since inconsistency makes sense only in the context of a system of reasoning, it follows that some such system is being assumed. Quine will want to add, of course, that the merits of this system of reasoning are themselves in principle revisable in the light of experience, but this does not undermine the fact that, in any given context of inquiry, there

must be some principles of reasoning that are not then in question. Thus even Quine has to allow the legitimacy of a distinction between the system of reasoning which guides one's current context of inquiry, and is therefore not currently in question, and other matters which are open to debate, i.e. a contextual distinction between, in effect, what is a priori and what is empirical.

The traditional conception of logic is that of a system of reasoning which is legitimately applicable to all contexts, i.e. as absolutely a priori. As I indicated earlier, Quine holds that, on the contrary, even logic is revisable in the light of experience. I suggested that Quine's claim is questionable, but since it is not important to the present discussion whether or not the absolute status of some system of logic can be vindicated, the matter can be left open. What is more important here is the relationship between the a priori/empirical distinction and the analytic/synthetic distinction.

It is plausible to hold that our understanding of some of our vocabulary is, in part, formed by our knowledge of the ways in which use of this vocabulary is located within a network of implications. If one thinks of logical vocabulary, i.e. the use of words such as 'if', 'all' and 'not', this seems unproblematic; and the point can be readily extended to our understanding of the vocabulary employed in informal conceptual conceptions. Hence the existence of even a contextual a priori/empirical distinction will support a similarly contextual analytic/synthetic distinction (though the issue of the possibility of synthetic a priori truths needs consideration). As compared with the logical empiricist position, however, there is an important reversal of priorities here: analyticity is here derived from a priori status, rather than vice-versa. Thus it is considerations of rationality, rather than meaning, which are now taken to be fundamental. (I leave it open whether a necessary/contingent distinction can be supported by a similar association between necessity and the a priori since I discuss post-Quinean debates about necessity and possibility in Chapter 6).

Since analyticity is here taken to be relativized to contexts of inquiry, the position is similar to Carnap's: his 'linguistic frameworks' provide systems of reasoning appropriate to different contexts of inquiry, and one can derive from them a contextual basis for a distinction between a change in meaning and a change in belief. But Carnap misrepresents the resulting position: having observed that external questions concerning the merits and defects of a framework cannot be answered by invoking the forms of reasoning characteristic of the framework which are employed when dealing with internal questions, he maintains that external questions can only be answered by reference to pragmatic criteria such as efficiency, fruitfulness, and simplicity. This makes it sound as though there is a sharp contrast between internal rationality and external pragmatism. But since Carnap accepts Duhem's thesis he has to allow that pragmatic considerations also have an inescapable place in handling internal questions; and it is equally clear that raising and resolving external questions involves bringing forward reasons. This last point merits further attention.

An external question can arise from previously unnoticed inconsistencies within the language (a famous example of this is Russell's discovery in 1903 of an inconsistency within set theory); more often it arises because the language in question fails to capture similarities or distinctions that have become apparent through unanticipated empirical discoveries (such as that of the constancy of the speed of light). Finally, it can arise through philosophical argument: Quine's indeterminacy thesis, in effect, poses an external challenge to the conception of meaning. In all these cases, however, the challenge cannot arise without presupposing implications that are not being called into question. For there cannot be a challenge to the system of reasoning characteristic of the use of a vocabulary which does not arise from other commitments inherent in the use of the vocabulary which are not being called into question at the same time. Thus the challenge raised by an external question is usually one of constructing, in the light of these other commitments, a revised system of reasoning for the vocabulary of the language which, for the time being, best enables speakers to make the distinctions they need to make in order to carry forward their inquiries or other practices. Conceptual revision has to take place 'at sea', in the context of other practices of reasoning (I say more about this in Chapter 7).

Thus although a contextual a priori/empirical distinction does give rise to an analytic/synthetic distinction, the distinction is not sharp. Once the need for conceptual revision in the light of empirical

discoveries is conceded, it has to be acknowledged that the 'analytic' implications inherent in our ordinary understanding and use of some terms can have 'synthetic' presuppositions. The most striking example of this comes from logic: standard systems of logic presuppose that there is something rather than nothing, and this is plainly a synthetic matter of fact, even if it is not a point on which we can imagine ourselves revising our beliefs. Hence although an analytic/synthetic distinction can be constructed in the way I have suggested, no great philosophical significance should be attached to it. This conclusion is not, however, a complete vindication of Quine's early scepticism: for the a priori/empirical distinction, which Quine sought to bring down as well, is both defensible and worth defending.

Despite the downgrading of questions about meaning, therefore, the legitimacy of a priori reasoning, even if it is context-dependent, implies that Quine's criticisms of analyticity do not necessitate a complete reappraisal of analytical philosophy. For, as I stressed in Chapters 1 and 3, philosophical concern with language was generally based upon the aspiration to find logical and conceptual analyses which provide a 'perspicuous representation' (to use Frege's phrase) of our patterns of reasoning; indeed, as I observed earlier, Quine himself has been a conspicuous contributor to analytical philosophy in this sense. As we shall see in later chapters this continues to be the case: analytical philosophers who address questions about the limits of human knowledge or challenges to moral responsibility do not set out to find synonyms for the expressions we use in these areas of discourse. Instead they seek to advance our understanding by articulating the principles of reasoning implicit in our talk and thought—though often only in order to make it clear how an external challenge to these principles is to be developed and assessed.

Wilfred Sellars

I have concentrated here on Quine because he has been, without question, the most influential American philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century. It would, however, be quite wrong to imply

that all important American philosophers of the early post-war period were followers of Quine, and in order to correct any such impression it is important to discuss, albeit rather briefly, the work of Wilfred Sellars (1912–89) whose name is often linked with Quine's but whose philosophy points in different directions.

Sellars is a surprising and intriguing thinker. Although his father Roy Wood Sellars (1880–1973) was an important member of the American 'Critical Realist' school of philosophy that flourished at the start of the century, and whose 'realism' involved rejection of the idealism of the previous generation of American philosophers, much of Wilfred Sellars' work has involved reflection on themes from Kant's philosophy, which is the classic source of the idealist philosophy his father rejected. But if reflection on Kantian themes concerning the irreducibility of the category of self-conscious rational persons who are free moral agents constitutes one side of Sellars' work, the other side is provided by a characteristically American emphasis on the merits of the understanding of ourselves and the world that is furnished by the natural sciences. To use an idiom from Quine, Sellars' project was to 'naturalise' Kant's philosophy.

This project is best set out in the papers collected in his book *Science, Perception and Reality* (1963) in which Sellars compares the 'manifest image of man-in-the-world' with the 'scientific image' of man. The content of the scientific image is provided by the natural sciences, and Sellars is unequivocal in proclaiming the unqualified status of scientific knowledge: 'science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not' (p. 173). The 'manifest image', by contrast, is 'the framework in terms of which man first came to be aware of himself as man-in-the-world. It is the framework in terms of which, to use an existentialist phrase, man first encountered himself—which is, of course, when he came to be man' (p. 6). This image is, Sellars observes, not necessarily unscientific: but it is grounded in our conception of ourselves as persons, and, therefore, excludes scientific theories which either make no place for persons or challenge the conception of the world in terms of which persons understand themselves.

Sellars takes it that the conception of the physical world characteristic of the manifest image is incorrect insofar as it conflicts with the

scientific image; it is, he says (using a characteristic Kantian idiom), merely 'a world of appearances'. A case in point concerns colours: Sellars takes it that although according to the manifest image physical objects are coloured, the scientific image undermines this impression by explaining away the phenomenon of colour. Yet despite this conflict between these two images, Sellars insists that we should aspire to a 'stereoscopic' point of view which somehow does justice to both of them. The reason for this is that despite the tension between them, each needs the other. Thus insofar as the scientific image does not accommodate the conception of ourselves as rational thinkers, it cannot make sense of its own status as knowledge. For in describing a mental state as one of knowledge, Sellars holds, we are not giving an empirical description of it which might be confirmed by a scientific theory of cognition; instead 'we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says' (p. 169), and this 'logical space of reasons' is precisely the domain of the manifest image. Equally the manifest image cannot provide any account of the origin of rational thought, for the emphasis within this image on the perspective of the person, the rational thinker, excludes the possibility of any account of the origins of rationality, since a rational thinker cannot conjure her rationality out of that which is non-rational. Hence the manifest image has here to indicate its own dependence upon an evolutionary perspective that belongs within the scientific image.

Yet how is this stereoscopic but unified vision to be achieved? The context within which Sellars gave the clearest account of this unity is provided by his account of the role of thoughts within explanations and justifications of action. Sellars argued, first, that from within the scientific image there is good reason for us to postulate brain states that play an important part in accounting for our behaviour. For human behaviour has a complexity which transcends the capacity of simple stimulus-response theory. Furthermore, Sellars argued, we can elucidate the explanatory role of these brain states through an analogy with sentences whereby we regard the brain states as involving sentence-like structures that represent states of the environment or of the organism. So far we are still working within the scientific image; but, Sellars

suggests, once we find that this analogy is genuinely helpful, we can 'translate' the 'sentences' which characterize the causal functional role of the brain states into our own language and, as such, assess the behaviour thus explained as more or less rational, employing now the normative categories of the manifest image. So, as he writes, 'the "relationship" of the logical to the real order is, in the last analysis, a matter of certain items in the real order playing roles' (p. 57).

Sellars' line of thought here, in papers written around 1960, is sketchy, but astonishingly prescient. As we shall see in Chapter 9, Sellars has sketched out some of the main themes of recent philosophy of mind. Where Ryle just assumed the viability of a dual-aspect theory of mind which combines the practical rationality of the manifest image and the kind of causal explanation characteristic of the scientific image, Sellars offers the beginnings of a position which suggests how a stereoscopic vision of these two aspects may be achieved (though, as we shall also see in Chapter 9, there remain many difficulties here).

Sellars is in fact best known today for his attack on 'the Myth of the Given'. In his use of the term 'the Given' Sellars is referring to the position of C. I. Lewis which I described in Chapter 1 (pp. 9–10); but, more generally, Sellars seeks to attack the views of those philosophers who have held that our knowledge of the physical world is ultimately justified by reference to sense-experience conceived of as something that is simply 'given'—i.e. as 'sense-data'. Sellars' objection to this is inspired by Kant and draws, predictably, on the irreducibility of the manifest image. Because knowledge involves justification it belongs within the 'logical space of reasons' characteristic of the manifest image, and it cannot therefore be grounded in something outside this space, in the bare facts of sense-experience, however sophisticated our scientific understanding of these facts may be.

Sellars does not of course deny that sense-experience plays a part in our knowledge of the physical world; the part it plays, however, is first and foremost causal. Although sense-experience cannot give itself a warrant which certifies the authenticity of the information about the world that it provides, what it can and does do is to cause us to form beliefs about the world in a way which ensures that many of these beliefs are both normally and recognizably reliable; and where true

beliefs are of this kind we accord them the status of knowledge. As we shall see in Chapter 8, this point connects directly with a central theme of current discussion in epistemology. So in this respect too, Sellars turns out to prefigure contemporary debate.

5

Understanding Language

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, a central theme of twentieth-century philosophy has been the fundamental importance of language, and there was one final major debate concerning the proper understanding of language and its place within philosophy before attention moved to other areas of philosophy. The chief protagonists in this debate were the American philosopher Donald Davidson (1917–), and the British philosopher Michael Dummett (1925–). I shall begin with an account of Davidson's side of the argument, which is largely expressed in the remarkable series of papers which form his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (1984: though most of the papers date from the 1970s).

Davidson and Truth-conditions

Davidson studied with Quine and has always been closely associated with him; indeed there are significant acknowledgements to Davidson in Quine's writings, especially concerning the indeterminacy thesis. But in important respects Davidson is to Quine much as Quine was to Carnap—disciple, but also decisive critic. A characteristic disagreement concerns the considerations which they take as their starting point for an inquiry into language. Where Quine's scientific naturalism led him to maintain that our understanding of language must be based upon an identification of the stimuli which prompt speakers to speak as they do, Davidson has no similar commitment to 'naturalism' (a term he avoids) and returns to the position proposed by Frege at the start of the twentieth century, to the effect that the route to an account of meaning and understanding must begin from a concern with truth.

In developing this account Davidson makes much use of the concept of the 'truth-conditions' of a sentence, and this requires a brief introduction. The basic conception of a truth-condition for a sentence is simply that of a condition under which the sentence is true and which is also implied by the sentence's truth. Thus the fact that the sentence 'grass is green' is true in English if and only if grass is green shows that grass being green is a truth-condition of the sentence 'grass is green'. As this case indicates, a truth-condition for a sentence S is standardly expressed by a two-way conditional of the form 'sentence S is true if and only *C*' where *C* is replaced by a clause which, as it is said, 'gives' a truth-condition of S.

It is obvious that if a sentence of a language means that grass is green, then that sentence is true if and only if grass is green. Truth-conditions can thus be inferred from meaning. Following Frege, however, Davidson proposed that the direction of this inference be reversed, that an account of the truth-conditions of the sentences of a language should be used to provide a specification of their meaning. In order to understand this proposal it is best to consider a situation in which the language under consideration (the 'object-language') is not the same as that used to give the truth-conditions (the 'metalanguage'). We should therefore start by considering a claim such as that 'Gras ist grun' is true in German if and only if grass is green. This claim is surely correct, and appears to display the meaning of the German sentence by giving a truth-condition for it.

But there is a complication here, in that there is a sense in which all true sentences have the same truth-conditions. This follows from the fact that where *A* and *B* are any two true sentences, the sentence '*A* if and only if *B*' is also true. This may seem wrong, and the interpretation of 'if and only if' employed here is not the only one possible, so that there are alternative, less permissive, conceptions of a truth-condition; but Davidson himself accepts this one precisely because by itself its application incorporates no potentially question-begging assumptions about meaning. To illustrate the implications of its use let us go back to the fact that 'Gras ist grun' is true in German if and only if grass is green. Since grass is green and Washington DC is the capital of the USA, it follows that grass is green if and only if Washington DC is the capital of the USA, and thus that 'Gras ist grun' is also true in German if and only if Washington DC is the capital of the USA. Yet the fact that 'Gras ist grun' has this truth-condition tells one next to nothing about its meaning.

In order to deal with this point Davidson holds that it is only where the account of a truth-condition for a sentence meets certain further requirements that it provides a specification of the sentence's meaning, and most of the substance of his account of meaning and understanding lies in these further requirements. The first and most important requirement is that the account of a sentence's truth-condition be one which can be derived within a general theory which yields correct accounts of the truth-conditions for all the sentences of the language involved on the basis of 'axioms' which concern the significance of the basic vocabulary and syntax of the language. In making this proposal Davidson invokes Tarski's work in logic in order to support the hypothesis that there can be a systematic 'theory of truth' for a language which yields a specification of truth-conditions for the sentences of a language on this basis. One can think of this feature of Davidson's approach as an acknowledgement of the familiar fact that the meaning of a sentence depends on the meanings of the words it contains.

To revert to the previous example, Davidson's suggestion is that if we think of all the sentences to be constructed in German which employ (along with other words) the words 'Gras', 'ist' and 'grun', and the simple grammatical construction which combines them, and in particular sentences such as 'Das ist Gras' ('that is grass') and 'Dieser ist grun' ('this is green'), we should recognize that the only way we can expect to get a correct description of all their truth-conditions is by identifying the role of 'Gras' as a way of describing grass, the role of 'grun' as a way of describing the colour green and so on—so that we end up with that account of the truth-conditions of the sentence 'Gras ist grun', namely that it is true if and only if grass is green, which, intuitively, we think of as capturing its meaning. Hence although it remains the case that this sentence is also true if and only if Washington DC is the capital of the USA, we have good reason to think that this latter specification of its truth-condition does not capture the meaning of the sentence, since it will not be implied by a theory which systematically assigns

truth-conditions correctly across the language purely on the basis of assignments to the basic vocabulary and grammar of the language.

By imposing this structural condition on the selection of that privileged specification of a sentence's truth-condition which is to capture its meaning, Davidson aims to extract fine-grained meanings from coarse-grained truth-conditions. Since the structural condition implies that the meaning of any one sentence in a language is bound up with that of others, it follows that his conception of meaning is 'holistic'. Arguably this is problematic, and I shall discuss below Michael Dummett's criticism of it on this account. But the aspect of Davidson's position that requires attention now is his proposed method of identifying truth-conditions for the sentences of a language in the first place. For on the one hand, this is not covered by the discussion so far and is plainly not just a matter of straightforward anthropological observation; but, on the other, without some such method, his position does not yield an account of our ability to understand each other.

Radical Interpretation

To deal with this, Davidson takes a leaf, or, rather, a chapter, out of Quine's book by characterizing the theorist as someone engaged in the project of 'radical interpretation', thereby integrating the older Fregean conception of sentence meanings as truth-conditions with Quine's empiricist emphasis on the need for evidence from the linguistic behaviour of speakers to justify discriminations of meaning. But there are important differences between Quine's project of radical translation and Davidson's project of radical interpretation. The change in idiom from 'translation' to 'interpretation' is not by itself important: translation involves matching alien sentences with sentences of the linguist's own language, and since the linguist understands her own language, translation will enable her to give an account of the meaning of the alien sentences—which is what interpretation amounts to. But this change is nonetheless indicative of much more important differences: where Quine's radical translator just seeks to provide translations of alien sentences which match, ultimately on the basis of observed

stimulus-meanings, sentences in the linguist's own language, Davidson's radical interpreter has to develop a systematic account of the truth-conditions of sentences of the alien language on the basis of her experience of the aliens. Because of the systematic character of such a theory this is a more strenuous undertaking than that of Quine's radical translator, and the central concern with the identification of truth-conditions raises issues that do not arise within Quine's project.

Indeed it may well appear that the rather abstract character of radical interpretation as described by Davidson makes it inappropriate to use it in an account of our ordinary understanding of language. For, as Davidson allows, when we engage in normal conversation we do not explicitly draw on a systematic theory of this kind. Nonetheless, he holds that his account of the matter provides a model which makes explicit the conditions under which our ordinary understanding of each other is possible. For, he maintains, there is nothing more to the meaning of language than is potentially revealed by radical interpretation. In this sense, therefore, he holds that radical interpretation is an inescapable feature of our understanding of language: 'all understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation'. (*Inquiries*, p. 125)

But how is radical interpretation possible? How can one understand the behaviour, and especially the linguistic behaviour, of an alien being about whose mental life nothing detailed is assumed to be known in advance? The basic condition, according to Davidson, is that the alien be a thinker much like us, with thoughts and utterances which stand in rational relations to each other and in causal relations to the physical and social environment that are broadly similar to those which inform our own thoughts and utterances. As a result the interpreter should be able to identify, tentatively, features of the physical and social environment in the light of which the aliens take the utterance of certain simple types of sentence to be true there and then; and if Davidson's basic condition is satisfied, the interpreter is entitled to hold that these features are not only conditions under which the aliens take these sentences to be true, they are also likely to be conditions under which the sentences, as then uttered, are in fact true. This does not exclude the hypothesis that the aliens may turn out to be mistaken with

respect to some of these matters, nor that the radical interpreter identifies wrongly the relevant features of the situation: for it only creates a presumption of truth. But the claim is, nonetheless, that mistakes of both kinds are intelligible only against a background of general correctness which secures the interpretation of the basic vocabulary. The more an interpretation suggests that the aliens are radically mistaken in their beliefs about their immediate environment and each other, the more it undermines itself as an interpretation of their utterances.

The interpretation of these simple sentences provides an entry-point for the radical interpreter. For the words which occur in them also occur in other sentences whose utterance is not so clearly tied to the speaker's current environment. But in interpreting these utterances a second element of Davidson's method is brought into play: the need to 'rationalize' the alien by interpreting his utterances in such a way that his overall behaviour—the combination of observed utterances and actions together with the implied experiences and thoughts—makes sense as the expression of a reasonably coherent point of view. This requirement reflects the basic presumption that the alien is a rational thinker whose imputed beliefs provide him with reasons for other beliefs, desires, and actions. It also incorporates a holistic thesis which Davidson regards as characteristic of thoughts in general, namely that they exist only within networks. Thus if, say, an utterance of a sentence is to be interpreted as true if and only if the speaker needs a new pen, then, in ascribing to the speaker the thought that he needs a new pen, the speaker must also be regarded as capable of a range of related thoughts—concerning what pens are and how they used, what he needs a new pen for, how new pens differ from old ones, and so on. The connections here are rational, and reflect the fact that thoughts are essentially identified as combining conceptual capacities that must admit of other exercises.

These two key elements of Davidson's method, the presumptions of truth and of rationality, are, for him, basic a priori conditions of the possibility of understanding. They are sometimes described as a presumption of 'charity' towards those whom we wish to understand; but this is misleading since it makes it looks as though these assumptions are an optional extra. Instead, for Davidson, these presumptions are much more like the unavoidable demands of justice. Yet although they are unavoidable within interpretative inquiries, they have no role within the natural sciences; thus they indicate an a priori distinction between the methodology of the natural sciences and that of interpretative inquiries.

We shall return to this distinction in Chapter 9 in connection with Davidson's claim that there cannot be strict laws which connect mental and physical phenomena as such. Here I want to point briefly to connections with the positions of Quine and Wittgenstein. The way in which I drew on Davidson's discussion in suggesting a reinterpretation of Quine's indeterminacy thesis in Chapter 4 (pp. 85–6) will now be obvious. In fact Davidson does not directly challenge Quine's indeterminacy thesis; instead he says that once the distinctive a priori principles of interpretative inquiries (what I called the principles of a 'humanized' epistemology) are brought into the argument, apparent indeterminacies of translation or interpretation arise only from looking for distinctions within the alien language that are not there. But however the matter is handled, it is clear that Davidson is not a sceptic about meaning.

In the case of Wittgenstein, Davidson shares Wittgenstein's view that agreement in judgement is essential if there is to be objective truth (cf. Chapter 2, pp. 21–3). For Davidson, this claim is an implication of the thesis that in interpreting others we cannot avoid presuming that their beliefs are largely true and that they are generally rational; for in our judgements concerning questions of truth and rationality we necessarily rely on our own standards of rationality and our own beliefs. So in presuming that the beliefs of others are largely true we interpret them in such a way that they largely agree with us; but this agreement also makes it possible for us to understand them where we disagree with them. Since disagreement arises where we impute a mistake to another, and there is no possibility of objective truth where there is no possibility of being mistaken, it follows that our fundamental agreement with others is also a condition of the possibility of objective truth.

Thought and Language

Davidson's account of language has been of central importance in recent philosophical debate, and he himself has used it as the starting point for important arguments in other areas of philosophy. As I have just indicated, he connects his methodological distinction between the natural sciences and interpretative inquiries with the claim that mental and physical phenomena cannot be brought together as such within a unified scientific psychology. This bold claim requires the assumption that understanding a language is an essential feature of anything with mental states, and Davidson does indeed argue that there can be 'no thought without talk'—or, rather, that only those things which can interpret others can have thoughts at all.

Davidson's argument for this thesis, which he acknowledges to be counter-intuitive (especially among animal lovers), starts from the claim that among thoughts belief has a central position: one cannot be a thinker at all unless one has beliefs. This seems right: for thoughts of all kinds (fears, decisions, etc.) draw on the thinker's sense of how things are, i.e. its beliefs. Davidson claims next that even though most beliefs must be true, it is the mark of belief that error is always possible, and, he further maintains, one cannot have a belief unless one recognizes that one might be in error. The final step in the argument is that it is only through an understanding of the errors of others that one can arrive at an understanding of the possibility of being in error oneself. So 'a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another' (*Inquiries*, p. 157).

This is an ambitious line of argument and the emphasis on the conditions for the possibility of error is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's discussion (see Chapter 2, p. 21). The distinctive and contentious feature of Davidson's argument is that these conditions include the requirement that the thinker possess an understanding of what it is to be in error. His critics object that it makes sense to suppose that a dog can be in error, e.g. concerning the location of a bone it has buried, without having the capacity to understand this aspect of its situation. Davidson's response is that where a thinker is genuinely in error, it

must make sense to suppose that the thinker is surprised at the way things are, and that surprise involves a recognition of error. His critics reply that surprise need not be as rational as this: it can be just caused by finding that things are not as one believed them to be without the need for an additional recognition by the thinker of this fact.

What emerges from this debate is that, for Davidson, beliefs are not just dispositions to behaviour, but provide reasons for thoughts and actions; and, he argues, a thinker cannot be a rational agent, responding rationally to the experience of being in error, unless the thinker understands that it was in error, which it can do only if it can understand language. It is clear that the dispute here centres on the issue as to whether there is a viable conception of belief that is less demanding than the rationalist one Davidson employs. Since debates on this matter are prominent within contemporary philosophy of mind, I shall leave this question now in order to return to it in Chapter 9.

Against Scepticism and Relativism

Davidson's account of language also connects directly with epistemological questions: Davidson takes it to refute that form of scepticism which suggests that, for all we can establish to the contrary, it might turn out that the vast majority of our beliefs, especially those concerning what philosophers call 'the external world', are mistaken. For on Davidson's method we are committed to interpreting each other in such a way that this sceptical hypothesis is wrong; hence we cannot coherently take up such a sceptical attitude, either to others or to ourselves.

As such, the method of radical interpretation manifests a commitment to a modest form of 'realism', whereby we can only make sense of human life, including language and thought, when we place it in the context of an objective natural and social environment whose features cause and rationalize our utterances, thoughts, and actions. This kind of realism contrasts with the relativist claim that there is no such shared world which is the environment of different thinkers and cultures, and Davidson has used his account of language as the basis for an influential

critical discussion of this claim. His particular target is the relativist thesis that our own way of thinking, our own 'conceptual scheme', is but one of a variety of different ways of thinking, each of which appropriates to itself its own 'world' and between which there is no basis for comparison. This thesis has been perennially popular with anthropologists and sociologists (it is especially associated with E. Sapir (1884–1939) and Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941), and is often called the 'Sapir–Whorf' thesis). It has never been equally popular among philosophers, although Carnap's way of relativizing internal questions to linguistic frameworks might suggest a position of this kind; but Davidson's discussion was especially prompted by the revival of relativism during the 1960s as a result of the influential work in the history and philosophy of science of Thomas Kuhn (1922–96), whose work I shall discuss in Chapter 7 (where we will see that Kuhn is not best understood as a relativist).

Davidson's discussion starts from the hypothesis that we can identify conceptual schemes with languages and then represent the relativist thesis as the claim that there is a variety of mutually untranslatable languages each of which provides, in its own terms, a viable way of thinking about the world and none of which can claim the privilege of distinctively representing things as they 'really are'. Davidson's objection to this thesis is that we should reject the relativist's assumption that there is a plurality of mutually untranslatable languages. For, he argues, any language which provides a viable way of thinking about a world must provide a way of expressing truths about this world; and yet it is of the essence of truth that truths are translatable.

Davidson takes this last point without discussion from Tarski; but since it is the key to his position it merits some attention. As I see it, the basic point is just that there cannot be inconsistent truths. Hence, wherever we encounter in an alien language a putative truth which, on the face of it, we cannot translate into our own language, we incur no threat of inconsistency if we seek to incorporate this truth into our language by adding some new vocabulary and explaining its meaning in whatever way we made intelligible to ourselves, in the first place, the existence of the putative truth that we could not straightforwardly translate. This may well not be straightforward if we also wish to shed some of the assumptions which are associated with the use of this vocabulary; but the consistency of all truths implies that in principle some such accommodation must be possible. So on this way of thinking, what is untenable about the relativist position is the supposition that there are truths which are in principle untranslatable into a consistent extension of our language.

Since the possibility of translation suffices to ensure that, in principle, different thinkers can make sense of each other as inhabitants of a common world, the relativist thesis that there is no such common world is undermined. So far, then, so good: but Davidson, to my mind unwisely, extends his argument into a general critique of 'the very idea of a conceptual scheme' (this is the title of the paper in which Davidson discusses this matter), which he stigmatizes as the 'third dogma' of empiricism (the others being Quine's two dogmas—cf. Chapter 4, p. 72). Davidson's argument for this claim is that all talk of conceptual schemes carries with it a commitment to the kind of relativism he has shown to be untenable. But this is not persuasive. Conceptual schemes are constituted by networks of a priori commitments of the kind described in the previous chapter. Thus Sellars' contrast between the 'scientific image' and the 'manifest image' of man-in-the-world is an example of two conceptual schemes (a phrase Sellars himself uses in this connection) in apparent conflict; and all that Davidson's anti-relativist thesis implies is that there must be a way of bringing the truths inherent in these two images into a coherent view of man, which is of course precisely what Sellars seeks to do. Indeed Davidson's own contrast between the methodology of the natural sciences and that of interpretative inquiries is essentially a reformulation of Sellars' contrast, and is itself a case of two conceptual schemes in tension, a tension which Davidson himself has also sought to resolve.

In considering how such tensions can be resolved there is an important difference between monists and pluralists in philosophy. Monists believe that somehow the conflicts must be susceptible of a resolution within some one ultimate theory which can incorporate all truths; whereas pluralists hold that this is a quasi-theological illusion, and that we should learn to be content with the kind of consistency that is achieved by settling border disputes in a piecemeal fashion. Davidson's

argument against conceptual schemes seems to assume that only a monist position is defensible; but where the limits of different subject-matters, or different points of view, are respected there seems to me no objection in principle to a pluralist position. As I mentioned earlier (Chapter 2, p. 23) the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy is instructive here: his early work, the *Tractatus*, has a monist conception of language, but one of the changes characteristic of his later work is the switch to accepting that there is an irreducible plurality of language-games. And in practice Davidson is also a pluralist of this kind. Hence the true implication of his position is just that in philosophy (as in politics) we have to learn to live with a plurality of standards (i.e. conceptual schemes) without becoming relativists.

Semantic Analysis

Davidson links his attack on conceptual schemes (the 'third dogma') with Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction (the 'second dogma'). Nonetheless, he has also proclaimed the merits of semantic analysis as a method of philosophical inquiry, and this method was extremely influential during the 1970s, especially in Oxford where, as it was said, a 'Davidsonic boom' swept across the philosophical landscape. The key to it lies in the thesis discussed at the start of this chapter, that our understanding of a language can be modelled on knowledge of a systematic theory of truth-conditions for the language. For such a theory requires that the sentences of the language be assigned a semantic analysis which specifies the contribution of the constituent words and syntactic structures to determining the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they occur. Davidson's claim has then been that in some cases the resulting semantic analysis yields philosophically significant conclusions by showing us how the world must be in certain respects if our patterns of talk are to make sense. For example, Davidson argues, causation is shown to be a relation between events, and actions are shown to be events to which we as agents are related by our action.

This 'method of truth in metaphysics', as Davidson has called it, is an up-dating of old-style logical analysis as practised by Russell, and

Davidson argues that his method of semantic analysis is a new way of revealing 'logical form'. The popularity of Davidson's new method is easily understood; unfortunately, however, as with Russell's old method, it turns out that the old metaphysical disputes (about causation, action and so on) can be reformulated as debates about the correct semantic analysis of the requisite area of discourse. So although the questions raised when applying the method of semantic analysis certainly require an answer, the method has turned out to be less decisive than was originally hoped.

Dummett and Understanding

As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, Davidson's writings are one side of a long-standing Anglo-American debate, the other side of which has been provided by the Oxford philosopher Michael Dummett. Their works exemplify very different styles of writing: while Davidson has written a series of short, dense, papers, Dummett has written several large books. I shall concentrate on the position he puts forward in two of his later ones, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (1991), and *The Seas of Language* (1993: a collection of papers, mostly from the 1980s).

Although Dummett studied philosophy at Oxford at the time of the dominance of the ordinary language movement discussed in Chapter 2, he remained detached from that enthusiasm, and much of his early work was directed to furthering a proper appreciation of Frege's writings (which provides an immediate point of contact with Davidson since he also started from a position broadly inspired by Frege). According to Dummett, Frege effected a 'revolution' in philosophy by showing, in principle, how debates about language provide a fundamental forum for philosophical debate. In accordance with this conception of Frege's achievement, therefore, Dummett has developed a philosophy of language of his own through which he has aspired to provide 'the logical basis of metaphysics'.

Like Davidson, Dummett holds that a philosophical concern with language must be based on an account of the understanding of language. But whereas Davidson takes the position of the interpreter, or