Davidson on Intentionality and Externalism

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1. On connecting language with reality

A central puzzle in the large cluster of problems connected with intentionality is whether and in what way language is connected with reality. We employ the signs of language to refer to objects in reality and to describe how things are in the world. What is said by the utterance of an assertoric sentence is true if things in reality are as they are thus described as being. The sentence uttered is standardly the expression of the thought or belief of the speaker, whose thought is true if what he thinks is what is the case. The intentionality of thought and of speech alike is puzzling. For we want to know how it can be that thought can reach right up to reality (be *about* the very object which one is thinking of), and how it is that when we utter a sentence, we mean by that sentence that such-and-such is the case, that we 'with what we mean—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but mean: that such-and-such is thus-and-so'.[1]

The overwhelming temptation is to try to explain the phenomena of the intentionality of speech in terms of a semantic (meaning-endowing) connection between the signs of language and reality. Names, it seems, must be *connected* to objects in reality, which are their meanings (*vide* Russell and the *Tractatus*) or which partly determine their meanings (externalism). I shall call this *the semantic connection thesis*. The meaning or sense of a sentence is often thought to be a function of the meanings of its constituent words and their manner of combination. If so, then the sense of a sen-

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[1] L. Wittgenstein *Philsophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §95. The latter problem, namely of how it can be that one can think or mean the very state of affairs which makes one's thought true or satisfies one's expectation even if it does not yet exist and indeed may never exist if one's thought is false or one's expectation is unsatisfied, will not be discussed in this paper.

References in the text to the works of Wittgenstein will be abbreviated, as is customary, as follows: BB—*The Blue and Brown Books*; PG—*Philosophical Grammar*; PI—*Philosophical Investigations*; PLP is used to refer to F. Waismann, *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*.

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tence, which is commonly conceived as its truth-conditions, is partly determined by the connections between its constituents and items in reality which are or fix their meaning. These connections may then be invoked to explain the intentionality of linguistic utterances, explanations varying according to the account given of the mode of connection.

Various strategies have been essayed to explain the semantic connection. One may explain it by reference to the intentionality of thought. I shall call this *the priority thesis*, for it explains the intentionality of language by reference to the allegedly prior intentionality of thought. Within this strategy, one may make different tactical moves. On some classical empiricist views (e.g. Locke's), thought is conducted in the medium of ideas or images. The words of speech stand for ideas in the mind of the speaker. The simple ideas which are the basic building blocks of thought were originally caused by items in reality. Ideas represent whatever they (extra-mentally) represent (and refer to whatever they extra-mentally refer to) in virtue of causal relations between the ideas and what they are ideas of. Accordingly, the representational power of ideas is explained in terms of their causal origins. The intentionality of speech is explained by reference to the intentionality of thought, for the signs of language are connected by association with ideas, and they refer to and represent what they represent by virtue of the ideas for which they stand. The semantic connection between words and world is mediated by ideas. Few today would wish to pursue the old 'Way of Ideas', the role of words not being to stand for ideas. But Locke's causal thesis, *mutatis mutandis*, still soldiers on in the writings of contemporary 'externalists', such as Putnam, Burge and Davidson. For it is commonly argued that what words mean is fixed in part by the circumstances in which they were learnt, in which 'the basic connection between words and things is established' (KOM 56).[2] This connection, it is argued, is established by causal interactions between people and the world. Not the causation of ideas, but of dispositions to use words, must be invoked in any adequate account of language, meaning, and intentionality.

[2] References to Davidson's essays are abbreviated as follows: D—'Davidson, Donald', in S. Guttenplan (ed.) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 231–6; KOM—'Knowing One's Own Mind', repr. in Q. Cassam, (ed.) *Self Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 43–64; MS—'The Myth of the Subjective', repr. in M. Krausz (ed.) *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation* (University of Notre Dame, 1989), pp. 159–72; TT—'Thought and Talk', repr. in D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 155–70.

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A different tactical move is to argue that the medium of thought is itself linguistic—the language of thought. The supposition that thought itself is a kind of language may have different roots. One may argue, as the young Wittgenstein did, that thought is representational, and in order for a thought to represent whatever it represents, it must be composed of thought-constituents which stand to reality in the same sort of relationship as the words of a language, and, like any representation, must mirror the logical forms of what is represented.[3] Or one may argue, as Fodor has, that in order to learn a language one must already possess an innate language. For to learn what the predicates of a language mean involves learning that the extensions of predicates fall under certain truth-rules, and to learn that, one must have a language in which the predicates and the rules can be represented.[4] Accordingly, the words of speech represent what they represent because they translate the words of the language of thought. This move merely recapitulates the puzzles of the intentionality of speech at the level of thought. For some account has to be given of the intentionality of the signs of the language of thought.

A third tactical option (also present in the *Tractatus*, and pursued in a different form by Grice and Searle) ascribes the intentionality of the signs of speech to the intentions of the speaker, to his meaning what he does by the words he utters, it being of the nature of intentions and of meaning something to be intentional. So the intentionality of language is derived from the intrinsic intentionality of intending or speaker's meaning. Like the previous tactical move, this too merely replaces one puzzle by another. For the intrinsic intentionality of intending or meaning something is at least as puzzling as the alleged extrinsic or derivative intentionality of the signs of language. Moreover, it is by no means obvious that the 'meaning-intentions' involved in the Gricean reduction of non-natural meaning do not presuppose a mastery of language and linguistic meaning on behalf of the speaker which they are meant to explain.

If these options are inadequate, one might try a different strategy, namely to reject the priority thesis altogether—to deny that the intentionality of language is to be explained by reference to the prior intentionality of thought. This strategy has been pursued, in quite different ways, first by Wittgenstein and more recently by Donald Davidson. The former rejects the priority thesis *and* the

[3] Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), R. 37.

[4] J. A. Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), pp. 63f.

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semantic connection thesis—a radical move which has by and large met with bafflement. The latter rejects the priority thesis, arguing that the two are interdependent. 'Neither language nor thinking can be fully explained in terms of the other, and neither has conceptual priority' (TT 156). But he cleaves to the semantic connection thesis and holds the connection to be causal. Davidson's account is the subject of the following discussion.

2. Davidson's 'basic connection between words and things'

For over three decades Donald Davidson has laboured impressively on the construction of a comprehensive theory of the nature of language and linguistic understanding, on the analysis of the so-called propositional attitudes and the conditions for their rationality. He has emphasized the holism of the mental—the fact that beliefs, intentions and desires owe their identities in part to their position in the web of beliefs, desires and intentions in which they are embedded. And he has argued that all understanding of the speech of others involves interpretation or radical translation. I shall not be concerned with these claims in this paper. In his essays of the last decade, Davidson has endeavoured to integrate into his overall theory what he sees as the insights of externalism. This has led him to enrich his account of the individuation of belief. It is this that is my concern here.

Davidson's account of the logical form of belief sentences claimed that we identify another person's belief by relating that person to the sentence we use to characterize his dispositional mental state (D 232). In response to the current 'internalist/externalist' debate, he has elaborated his conception of the individuation of belief, taking for granted whatever qualifications are necessary *vis-à-vis* the holism of belief and interpretation. I shall do likewise in expounding and evaluating his claims.

He claims that we 'normally identify and individuate mental states and meanings in terms partly of relations to objects and events other than the subject', that mental states (such as believing) 'can be, and usually are, identified in part by their causal relations to events and objects outside the subject whose states they are' (KOM 47f., MS 167). For 'states of mind like doubts, wishes, beliefs and desires are identified in part by the social and historical context in which they were acquired; in this respect they are like other states that are identified by their causes, such as suffering from snow-blindness' (MS 170). Persuaded by Putnam that what our words mean is fixed in part by the circumstances in which they

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were learned, he argues that 'The issue depends simply on how the basic connection between words and things is established. I hold ... that it is established by causal interactions between people and parts or aspects of the world. The dispositions to react differentially to objects and events thus set up are essential to the correct interpretation of a person's thought and speech. If this were not the case, we would have no way of discovering what others think, or what they mean by their words' (KOM 56).

It is a truism that we learn our language in the course of interaction (though not only causal interaction) with other speakers of the language and with our environment. But what we thus learn is incorrectly characterized as dispositions to react differentially to objects and events; it is rather a multiplicity of rule-governed techniques of using words, the employment of which is relatively stimulus-free. Trivially, we typically find out what a person knows or believes by hearing what he says (but also by observing what he observes, and seeing what he does). And we can thereby come to know what he knows or believes only if we understand what he says (which, *pace* Davidson, typically involves no interpretation[5]). But in order to understand what he says, we do not have to know the conditions or circumstances in which he acquired his linguistic mastery, we merely have to know what the words he uses mean in context (given the requisite presuppositions about the speaker's other beliefs). We individuate his beliefs by specifying what he believes, and it is true that a person's beliefs, hopes or suspicions arise out of a context, social or otherwise, which renders them intelligible. For it is the context that provides reasons for his belief, hope or suspicion, as well as the institutions presupposed by them. (One can hope to checkmate one's opponent only if the institution of chess exists). Nevertheless, it is mistaken to claim that we individuate a person's beliefs by their *causal* relations to objects and events in his environment. Many different issues are involved here, some pertaining to the current internalist/externalist debate. I shall focus on four theses that Davidson defends:

(a) *The empiricist, naturalist thesis*: In response to the question of what it is that we know or grasp when we know the meaning of a word or sentence, Davidson affirms the 'commonplace of the empiricist tradition'. Namely, that we learn our first words through a conditioning of sounds or verbal behaviour to appropriate bits of matter in the public domain. But this 'is not just a story about how we learn to use words: it must also be an essential part of an ade-

[5] See P. M. S. Hacker, 'Davidson on First-person Authority', *The Philosophical Quarterly* **47** (1977), pp. 300–302.

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quate account of what words refer to and what they mean' (MS 163). What a person's words mean depends (in the basic cases) on the kinds of things that have caused the person to hold the words to be applicable (KOM 64). Davidson observes that the *details* of the causal mechanisms are irrelevant to meaning and reference. 'The grasp of meanings is determined only by the terminal elements in the conditioning process and is tested only by the end product: use of words geared to appropriate objects and situations' (MS 164). Despite this disclaimer, on his account an original causal nexus is pivotal to what a speaker's words mean and what he can mean by them.

(b) *Causal component of meaning*: 'There are no words, or concepts tied to words, that are not to be understood and interpreted, directly or indirectly, in terms of causal relations between people and the world (and, of course, the relations among words...)' (MS 170). 'In the simplest and most basic cases words and sentences derive their meanings from the objects and circumstances in which they were learned' (MS 164). Again, 'our simplest sentences are given their meanings by the situations that generally cause us to hold them true or false' (MS 165). The principle, he claims, 'is as simple and obvious as this: a sentence someone is inspired (caused) to hold true by and only by sightings of the moon is apt to mean something like "There's the moon" ... The claim is that all thought and language must have a foundation in such direct historical connections, and these connections constrain the interpretation of thoughts and speech' (KOM 56).

(c) *The connection between language and reality*: Language is *anchored to reality* by original conditioning: 'A sentence which one has been conditioned by the learning process to be caused to hold true by the presence of fires will be true when there is a fire present; a word one has been conditioned to cause to hold applicable by the presence of snakes will refer to snakes. Of course, very many words and sentences are not learned in this way, but it is those that anchor language to the world' (MS 164).

(d) *Genetic constraints on speaker's meaning*: What a speaker can use a word to refer to, what he can mean by a word, is dependent upon the original nexus between word and thing in the learning situation. 'The correct interpretation of what a speaker means is not determined solely by what is in his head; it depends also on the natural history of what is in the head' (MS 164). Indeed, a miraculously created being ('the Swampman'), physically identical with Davidson, who uses words just as Davidson does, could not mean what Davidson does by any word. Such a being 'can't mean what I do by the word "house", for example, since the sound "house" it makes was not learned in a context which would give it the right

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meaning—or any meaning at all. Indeed, I don't see how my replica can be said to mean anything by the sounds it makes, nor to have any thoughts' (KOM 47).

Each of these theses seems to me to be debatable, and the underlying causal conception of meaning flawed.

3. Critical evaluation

(a) It is indeed a commonplace of the empiricist tradition that the first stages of language learning are a form of conditioning. The investigation of such processes is a matter for empirical learning theory. But it is not a commonplace that this 'must also be an essential part of an adequate account of what words refer to and what they mean'. Since, as Wittgenstein pointed out, there is no action at a distance in grammar (PG 81, BB 14), since 'The way in which language was learnt is not contained in its use' (PG 80), the circumstances in which words were learned and the objects originally invoked in those circumstances are irrelevant to their meaning. What is relevant is how those words are now used, and how they are to be used—the latter being specified by explanations of meaning. Hence Davidson is right to emphasize that the details (indeed, not only the details) of the original, putative causal mechanisms are irrelevant to meaning and reference, that grasp of meaning is determined only by the terminal elements in the conditioning process and is tested only by the end product. But that is precisely why it is wrong to claim that what a person's words mean depends (in the most basic cases) on the kinds of things that have allegedly caused the person to hold the words to be applicable. What a person knows or grasps when he knows the meaning of a word or sentence is its use; he has acquired an ability, namely the ability to use the expression correctly. Acquisition of the ability may depend on the original conditioning situations, but these are irrelevant to the characterization of the ability. Moreover, the genesis of the ability does not enter into the criteria for its possession. The criteria for whether a person has grasped the meaning of a word are of three general kinds, to all of which the original conditioning or learning context is irrelevant. Namely, (i) using it correctly, (ii) explaining its use in context correctly, and (iii) responding appropriately to its use by others. It is by reference to such 'terminal elements' that the grasp of meaning is tested—and these are misdescribed as 'use of words geared to appropriate objects and situations'. To have learnt a language is to have mastered a technique (PI §150), and the technique mastered is a normative, rule-governed, one.

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(b_1) It may be a commonplace principle of the empiricist tradition that in the simplest cases 'words and sentences derive their meanings from the objects and circumstances in which they were learned', but it is not true. In so far as words and sentences can be said to derive their meaning from anything, they derive their meaning from the explanations of what they mean. For what a word means is given by an explanation of its meaning, which constitutes a rule for its correct use. It is misconceived to claim that any sentences, even the simplest ones, are 'given their meanings by the situations that generally cause us to hold them true or false' (MS 165). For situations, whether or not they can *cause* us to hold *sentences* true, cannot give sentences their meanings. Similarly, it is untrue that words are to be understood and interpreted, directly or indirectly, in terms of causal relations between people and the world (and, of course, relations among words). How a word is to be understood is given by an explanation of what it means. If someone does not know what 'to dehort' means, one may explain that it means the same as 'to advise against', and that explanation provides a rule which is to be followed in the application of the verb, and a standard against which to judge applications of the verb to be correct or incorrect. That can be said to be a relation among words. But equally, if someone does not know what 'black' means one may explain that 'black' means *this colour* ☞■. And that explanation likewise functions as a rule, *a standard of correctness for the application of the definiendum*—not as a causal stimulus, conditioning a behavioural response, which cannot be said to be right or wrong, correct or incorrect.

What the explanation says is that something can be said to be black if it is *this colour* ☞■. Such ostensive definitions do not 'connect language with reality'. Rather, a word is explained by reference to an optional sample, which belongs (*pro tempore*) to the means of representation, not to the domain of what is being represented. The ostensive definition does not represent anything—it explains how the definiendum is to be used and does not describe anything. The object pointed at is being used as a sample, and this sample is not the meaning of the word being defined, nor is the meaning of the word *derived* from the ostended object. It is in the practice of employing appropriate samples (whether optional ones—as in the case of 'black', 'red' or 'green', standard ones—as in the case of 'Wellington blue' or 'Brunswick green', or canonical ones) that criteria of identity for colours are determined, i.e. what is to *count* as the *same colour*. But a causally conditioned reaction cannot be or fix such a criterion of identity.

Davidson might reply that teaching a child what 'black' means by

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ostensive explanation is merely more causal conditioning. The stimulus of hearing the explanation '*This* ☞■ is black' simply *causes* the child to use the word 'black' or the sentence 'Black' (or 'That is black') of black and only black objects, in accordance with that stimulus. As Quine, who is more explicit on these matters, has written, the child 'is being trained by successive reinforcements and extinctions to say "red" on the right occasions and those only.'[6] But what makes an occasion *right*? Causal relations are contingent and *external*, but the 'relation' of the word 'red' to red things, the correctness of its application to red objects and the incorrectness of its application to green or blue ones, is not a contingent but an internal relation. If the 'stimulus explanation' causes the child to apply the word 'red' (or sentence 'This is red') to, and only to, poppies, what shows that it has *misunderstood* the explanation, that it is applying the word 'red' *incorrectly*, contrary to the explanation given?—Not anything that lies within the reach of a *causal* relation. Rather, the child applies the word correctly if and only if he applies it in accordance with the explanation of its meaning—in accordance with what *counts* as a correct application in the practice of employing the word. And he applies it incorrectly if and only if he applies it contrary to the explanation of its meaning. But *being in accordance with a rule* and *being contrary to a rule* are not causal, but normative relations within a rule-governed practice.

An explanation of a sign can replace the sign itself, and this fact brings out a contrast between an explanation of meaning and a causal explanation (PG 99). The ostensive gesture together with the utterance 'This C' (where 'C' specifies the relevant category of term) and the sample employed conjunctively constitute a partly 'concrete' symbol, which can be used in an utterance (which does describe or represent something), e.g. 'My shoes are *this colour* ☞■' instead of 'My shoes are black'. An ostensive definition, like a verbal definition, functions here as a substitution rule.[7] Hence

(c) As Wittgenstein stressed, 'there is no exit from language'. Original conditioning is training, not teaching. What the training effects is a pattern of verbal reaction to things and circumstances, not mastery of the techniques of the use of words, but merely the foundations thereof. This 'stimulus-conditioning' does not 'anchor'

[6] W. V. O. Quine, *The Roots of Reference* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1973). p. 208.

[7] For a comprehensive discussion of ostensive definition, see G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning—Volume 1 of an Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), in the essay entitled 'Ostensive definition and its ramifications'.

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language semantically to the world, but, of course, it presupposes mastery of the meaning, of the technique of use, of the relevant expression by the instructor—and this meaning is not 'derived' from anything other than the accepted explanations of meaning. Once the language learner has passed from the stage of training to asking what a so-and-so is or asking what such-and-such a word means, then his questions are answered by means of explanations of meaning—rules for the use of words. The child is now taught the meanings of words, not conditioned in their use. And explanations of word-meaning, whether verbal or ostensive, remain within language. Neither conditioning nor explaining word-meaning *anchors* language to reality, for language is not semantically *anchored to reality* at all. *In this sense*, there is no meaning-endowing connection between language and reality. Ostensive definition looks as if it connects language to reality, but that is an illusion. It connects spoken language with the 'language of gestures'. What looks like a 'connection between language and reality' is 'made by the definitions of words, and these belong to grammar, so that language remains self-contained and autonomous' (PG 97). Of course, we use words (*inter alia*) to refer to objects in reality; but it is not those objects that 'give' those words their meaning or 'determine' what they mean. It is human practices that give words their meaning, practices of explaining the meanings of words, of stipulating meanings for words, and of using words in accordance with their received explanations.

(b_2) Davidson explains his commonplace 'principle' as being 'as obvious as this: a sentence someone is inspired (caused) to hold true by and only by sightings of the moon is apt to mean something like "there's the moon".' His claim is that all thought and language must have a foundation in such direct historical connections. But the one word sentence 'Moon!' does not mean the same as 'There's the moon' *because* a child is inspired (or, more questionably, 'caused') to utter it (or, more questionably, to 'hold it true') by and only by sightings of the moon.

Compare

> (A) The presence of the moon and only the presence of the moon causes A to hold true [what is expressed by] the sentence 'The moon is there'.
> (B) The sentence 'The moon is there' means the same as 'The satellite of the earth is in this ☞ direction.'

The two propositions have an entirely different meaning. (A) is intended to be an empirical hypothesis, but (B) is a rule of language, an explanation of the meaning of a sentence. The linguistic convention is quite independent of the causal hypothesis (cf. PLP 115).

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Davidson's schematic causal account of the foundations of linguistic meaning resembles Russell's causal account of meaning in *Analysis of Mind* (though without the burden of Russell's apparatus of ideas), and it is open to similar objections, which Wittgenstein elaborated in the early 1930s.

(1) If A understands and 'holds true' the empirical sentence 'The moon is there', he must know what must be the case if what it says is true. But to know that, what he must know is not what has in the past inspired him (been a reason for him) to hold it true, but only what it means. And what it means is independent of any causal hypotheses concerning how it was learned. It depends only upon *what* was learned, i.e. the correct use of the expression, which is given by an explanation of meaning.

(2) If A, pointing at the sun, utters the one-word sentence 'Moon!' or 'The moon is there', then (A) is falsified, but (B) is not. The meaning of 'Moon!' or 'The moon is there' is unaffected by the falsification of the causal statement.

(3) Whether the child is using 'Moon!' correctly is determined by whether he uses it in accordance with the rules for its use, which are given by the generally accepted explanations of its meaning, not by *causal regularities*—which cannot determine criteria of *correctness* for the application of a word. The 'connection' between the word 'moon' and (its application to) the moon is set up by explanations of meaning, including ostensive definitions, not by causal links.

(4) The child may have been conditioned to utter 'Snake!' in the presence of snakes. But it would not follow from this empirical proposition that uttering 'Snake!' in the presence of a moving rope or a lizard was a *mistake*. A conditioned response cannot endow a word with meaning or render the utterance of a word a *misuse*. To repeat: words do not derive their meanings from objects, but from the explanations of their meaning, which are rules for their correct use. It is they which constitute standards of use against which the employment of words can be adjudged mistakes or misuses.

(5) If A 'holds true' this sentence and knows what it means, he understands it. But if so, he must also understand the sentence 'The moon is not there', for to understand an empirical sentence is to know what is the case if it (or, rather if what it says) is true *and* what is the case if it is false. But how can mere stimulus-conditioning to utter 'Moon' in and only in the presence of the moon ensure an understanding of the sentence 'The moon is not there'? (I can teach my dog to howl in and only in the presence of the moon, but it does not thereby learn what 'The moon is not there' means; or what 'The moon is there' means.)

(d) The correct interpretation of what a speaker means by his

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words is not determined solely *or partly* by what is in his head *or* by the natural history of what is in his head *if* 'determined' means 'consists in' or 'is shown by'.

(1) No doubt numerous normal brain processes must be going on for any speaker to use words with (or without) understanding. A human being can acquire and exercise linguistic abilities only if he has a normally functioning brain in such-and-such respects. But whatever may be going on in his cranium, be its natural history what it may, is not what meaning something consists in, nor is it evidence for what he meant by his words. It does not, in the relevant senses, determine *what* he means by his words. Furthermore, the meaning of a word is neither inside nor outside the head. Not being a kind of object, the meaning of a word is not anywhere. Roughly speaking, the meaning of a word is its use. And the use of a word, the way it is to be used, is not something inside or outside the head. Nor is it determined, either wholly or partly, by anything in the head—and the aetiology of anything in the head is irrelevant to the determination of what a word means.

(2) We do indeed learn the use of words, initially by being trained, later by being taught by way of explanations of meaning. These are empirical conditions for concept acquisition. The only form of dependence which a speaker's meaning something by a word has upon the original (normative) nexus between word and thing in the learning situation consists in the truism that if he had not learnt what the word means, he would not (save *per accidens*) be using it correctly, and would not know what it means. But precisely because 'the way language was learned is not contained in its use', the fact that a speaker means by his utterance '*p*' that *p* (or that *q*) or by the word 'W' such-and-such a thing or person does not consist in, and need make no reference to, the manner of his concept acquisition. Nor does the evidence for his meaning by his utterance what he thus means generally consist in facts about his concept acquisition, although it does consist, *inter alia*, in what he says when he explains what his utterance means.

(3) Nothing that takes place or obtains in the head or in the mind, no process, act or activity, state or event, constitutes meaning something. For meaning something is not a mental act, activity, state or process. When one tells a pupil to expand the series of even numbers, one means him to write '... 1002, 1004, ...' and so on, but *nothing* need obtain or go on in one's head for one to mean that or to mean by 'even numbers' numbers divisible by two. Indeed, nothing that could go on in one's head could have the consequences of meaning something (PI p. 217).

(4) We do not determine (find out) what someone meant by inves-

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tigating anything in his head or the natural history of anything in his head. We typically ask him what he meant, and his explanation is not a consequence of his examining what is or was in his head, let alone of its aetiology.

(5) Suppose A said 'Come here', meaning thereby that B should come. What determined his meaning B rather than C (i.e. why did he pick on B rather than C)? Not anything in his head, no matter how it is caused. He may have needed a strong person to help him lift a weight, and B, but not C, is strong enough.

If a Davidson replica who behaves like Davidson were to use words just as Davidson does, there is no reason to suppose that he would mean by them anything different from what Davidson would mean by them. The fact that this Swampman did not learn the word 'house' in 'a context which would give it the right meaning', indeed, did not *learn* his language in *any* context, is irrelevant to the question of what his words mean or of what he means by them. As argued, the *causal* conditions (if such they be) of concept acquisition cannot determine the use of a word as *right*. All that matters is whether he satisfies our ordinary criteria of understanding, viz. using words correctly, giving correct explanations of meaning, and responding appropriately (intelligently) to the utterances of others. If he does, then he uses words with 'the right meaning'. How he acquired his mastery of the techniques of the use of the language is no more relevant to the questions of whether this strange being means anything by the words he uses and what it is that he means than it is to the question of whether a stranger in the street means anything by his utterance 'I am looking for Professor N.'s house. Can you tell me how to get there?' The history of his language acquisition is neither here nor there.[8]

[8] Although I have not discussed Putnam's and Burge's variants of externalism here, it should be evident that the argumentative strategy pursued in this paper can be applied to their accounts too. Like Davidson, they fail to attend to the role and nature of ostensive definition by reference to samples (Putnam) and to speakers' explanations of meaning as criteria of understanding (Burge). And they too suppose the causal circumstances of concept acquisition have a bearing on the meanings of the terms learnt. But something can function as a defining sample only if it satisfies the conditions for use as a sample, i.e. as an object of comparison determining the application of a definiendum. The unknown microstructure of a quantity of stuff K is not a feature of any sample that could determine whether the term 'K' is to be applied to an object O by comparison with a sample. If the microstructure of O is relevant to its classification as K, then what 'K' means is not determined by the use of a sample as a standard of comparison.

What a person means by a term 'K' is determined by his explanation of what he means. What a term 'K' means is determined by what counts in a

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A causal account of meaning or of the foundations of meaning is not only defective in its own right, it is also powerless to illuminate those central puzzles about intentionality which it is often invoked to explain. Nor is it an essential or even possible element in the individuation and identification of beliefs. To believe that *p* is not to be in any mental state or to have a particular disposition.[9] Nor is believing that *p* illuminatingly characterized as an attitude towards anything. The belief a person has is individuated by reference to what he believes, not by reference to a sentence to which we relate him in reporting what he believes and by means of which we specify what it is that he believes. Specifying what a person believes may involve reference to objects and events (which may or may not exist or occur), but even when it does (and they do), these objects and events need have played no role in the genesis of his belief, and determination of the meaning of the terms he (or we) may use in specifying what he believes is independent of the causal history of his language acquisition.

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[9] P. M. S. Hacker, 'Davidson on the Ontology and Logical Form of Belief', *Philosophy* **73** (1998), pp. 81–96.

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linguistic community as a correct explanation of its meaning. It makes no sense to suppose that the meaning of a term transcends received explanations of its meaning. It is not the causal circumstances of language learning that determine what a term means, but the standards for its correct use as embodied in received explanations of what it means, the giving of which constitute criteria of understanding. (For an examination of Putnam's externalism, see P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 250–3, 329f.; for a critical discussion of Burge, see H.-J. Glock and J. M. Preston, 'Externalism and First-Person Authority', *The Monist* **78** (1995), pp. 517–21.)

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