

## Davidson's Semantic Program<sup>1</sup>

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Donald Davidson did it. He did it slowly, deliberately, in more than a half dozen widely noted essays. What he did was to elaborate a program for the study of empirical semantics. Nor did he stop there. He went on to apply his program to some of the problems that have long bedeviled semantics: action sentences, indirect discourse and propositional attitudes.

My goal in this paper is to assess Davidson's achievement. The first step is to assemble the program from the sketches and hints scattered among Davidson's papers.<sup>2</sup> This is the project of my first section where my aim is sympathetic exposition. Since Davidson sometimes seems to be playing a game of hide and seek with his reader, my reconstruction of his program and arguments is of necessity occasionally speculative. In the second section my stance turns critical. There are anomalies in the program; the sort of theory Davidson advocates is not the sort delivered. When the problems are pushed, I think the program loses whatever initial plausibility it may have had. It is my contention that Davidson has provided no serious framework for the empirical study of natural language. My final section strikes a more positive note. I will sketch three alternative projects with some claim to the title of empirical semantics, and suggest how some of Davidson's work might be reinterpreted as a sensible contribution toward carrying out one of them.

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1 I am grateful to John Bennett, Brian Loar, Thomas Ricketts, Brian Skyrms, John Wallace, and James Wiesel for their helpful suggestions on the topics discussed in this paper.

2 See the references on p. 227. The abbreviations given in the references will be used throughout the notes.

## I. The Program

1. Davidson's programmatic pronouncements can be viewed as an attempt to answer a cluster of questions that philosophers and linguists have too often avoided: What is a theory of meaning (or a theory of logical form) supposed to do? How are we to know that it has been done? What is it to get a theory of meaning (or logical form) *right*? With the neglect of these questions, the discussion of meaning has come to be something of a philosophical dump. While there is no shortage of problems, there is little agreement on what are to count as solutions. Confronted with the rubble, Davidson's strategy is obvious and compelling. Before constructing a semantic theory we must say what we want the theory to do. We must elaborate and defend a set of criteria for what it is to get the theory right.

The semantic theories Davidson advocates he calls sometimes "theories of meaning" and sometimes "theories of logical form." While it is not at all obvious that a theory of meaning would also be a theory of logical form, we shall see that both labels are *prima facie* plausible for the sort of theories Davidson recommends. However labeled, Davidson is consistent in insisting that the theories he seeks are empirical theories about natural languages.<sup>3</sup> The claim is a central one and will loom large in what follows.

2. What should a semantic theory do? Davidson gives a variety of replies, stated in a variety of ways. Among them two predominate. First, a theory of meaning for a language should *give the meaning* of every sentence in the language.<sup>4</sup> Or, what seems to be much the same point, "the theory [must] provide a method for deciding, given an arbitrary sentence, what its meaning is."<sup>5</sup> Second, the theory must render its account of the meaning of sentences by analyzing each sentence into parts drawn from a finite list. The sentence is then to be seen as built up from these parts using a finite number of constructions in such a way that the meaning of the sentence is determined by the semantic properties of the parts and constructions.<sup>6</sup> The demand that

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3 Cf. *T&M*, p. 34: "... the task of a theory of meaning as I conceive it is not to change, improve or reform a language, but to describe and understand it." Much the same point is stressed in several other places. Cf., for example, *SNL*, p. 183 and p. 185; *A&R*, p. 145.

4 Cf. *T&M*, p. 308; *TMLL*, p. 387.

5 *SNL*, p. 178.

6 Cf. *Saying*, p. 131: "[An account of logical form] must lead us to see the semantic character of the sentence — its truth or falsity — as owed to how it is composed,

the constructions and constituents be finite in number stems from a concern with learnability. We master our language in a finite time, and presumably we do so by accomplishing only a finite number of chores. Yet this finite number of steps gives us command of a language with infinite semantic capacity. There is no end to what can be expressed in a natural language. If we assume that language learning involves learning the meaning of a finite number of basic constituents and mastering a finite number of constructions, then, if the meaning of the constructs is a function of the meaning of their components, we have at least the beginnings of an understanding of how our infinite capacity can have been acquired in a finite time.<sup>7</sup> A third requirement, admittedly more vague and tentative than the pair that precede, is that the theory's specification of meanings for individual sentences should draw upon the same concepts as the sentences whose meanings they specify.<sup>8</sup>

A fourth requirement is of a rather different sort. The theory must be *testable*. We are seeking an empirical theory, and we must know what empirical data might constitute evidence for or against the theory. We want some tolerably sharp specification of what evidence will indicate when a proffered theory is correct — some way of finding out when we've got a theory right.<sup>9</sup>

These four requirements on a semantic theory are a mixed bag with mixed motivation. Each has a certain initial plausibility. It is not suggested that these are the only reasonable requirements that might be set for empirical semantics, only that they are among the reasonable requirements.

3. While the general goals Davidson lays down for empirical semantics are not likely to provoke controversy, his proposal for meeting these goals is more controversial. Davidson contends that in constructing a *theory of truth* for a natural language we will have built a theory of meaning that satisfies each of the four requirements. Indeed, we will have done quite a bit more. For a truth theory will also give us an account of logical truth and entailment in the object language. Thus a theory of truth will serve as well as a theory of *logical*

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by a finite number of applications of some of a finite number of devices that suffice for the language as a whole, out of elements drawn from a finite stock (the vocabulary) that suffices for the language as a whole." Cf. also *SNL*, p. 178.

7 Cf. *TMLL*, p. 387; *SNL*, p. 177; *Saying*, p. 131.

8 Cf. *SNL*, pp. 178-179.

9 *SNL*, p. 183; *T&M*, p. 311.

*form*. And there is, on Davidson's view, yet another benefit to be expected from a theory of truth, one which, from a philosophical point of view, is surely the most enticing. A truth theory can be expected to reveal something about the ontological or metaphysical presuppositions of our language. Since the truth theory is an empirical theory, the project of building it is at least one way of getting on with *empirical or descriptive metaphysics*.

These are exciting claims. To assess them we must first see just what Davidson takes a theory of truth to be. We will then go on to consider the claim that a truth theory for a natural language will satisfy the requirements set for empirical semantics. Finally, we will attend to the contentions that a truth theory is a theory of logical form and that doing truth theory is a way of doing descriptive metaphysics.

The archetypes for what Davidson calls a *theory of truth* are Tarski's theories and definitions of truth in formalized languages.<sup>10</sup> But the theories Davidson recommends need not follow Tarski's model in every particular. What is demanded of a truth theory, in Davidson's sense, is that it entail, for every sentence in the language, a statement of the conditions under which the sentence is true. In the simplest cases, those where the sentence at hand is unambiguous, declarative and free from indexicals, demonstratives and the like, this amounts to the demand that the theory entail an infinite number of bi-conditions of the form:

(1) *s* is true if and only if *p*.

Here '*s*' is to be replaced by a standardized description of the sentence and, where the object language is contained within the theoretical meta-language, '*p*' is replaced by the sentence itself. When the meta-language does not include the object language, '*p*' is to be replaced instead by a translation of the sentence named on the left.<sup>11</sup> (Following Davidson, such sentences will from time to time be referred to as *T-sentences*.) In less simple cases where the sentence at hand is not demonstrative or contains indexicals or is ambiguous, the right side of the biconditional will have to take a somewhat different form. Just how this is to be specified is not a matter Davidson has elaborated in

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10 Cf. *Concept*.

11 Cf. *SNL*, p. 184: "A theory of truth entails, for each sentence *s*, a statement of the form "*s* is true if and only if *p*" where in the simplest case "*p*" is replaced by *s*." Also see *T&M*, p. 309.

any detail.<sup>12</sup> But let us leave non-declaratives, indexicals and their ilk to one side. The appeal of the program is easier to portray without them; and none of the difficulties I will later press turn on the problems we are resolving to ignore.

If the language for which we seek a theory of truth can be viewed as quantificational, with all sentences built from a finite stock of names and predicates, using truth functional connectives, standard quantifiers and variables without limit, then Tarski's work provides an obvious pattern to follow in seeking a theory of truth. But if we insist only on the minimal characterization of truth theories so far offered, it appears we can dispense with the honest toil of following Tarski's pattern. Any language, quantificational or not, lends itself to a trivial theory of truth. We need only take as axioms of the theory every instance of the schema

s is true if and only if p.

Yet these one step theories are unlikely candidates for theories of meaning. They blatantly violate our second requirement. Clearly our minimal characterization of truth theories has been too permissive. To avoid such aberrant theories, Davidson stipulates that the non-logical axioms in a theory of truth must be finite in number.<sup>13</sup> Trivial theories with infinite axiom schemata are thus excluded, while theories in the Tarski mold are retained. We might well wonder whether Davidson's stipulation limits the class of acceptable truth theories to just those constructed on Tarski's pattern for languages of quantificational structure. Davidson rightly hints that the answer is no.<sup>14</sup>

4. In defending the claim that a truth theory will satisfy the criteria, the first step is the hardest. The first requirement on an empirical semantics was that it specify the meaning of every sentence in the language. How does a truth theory turn the trick? In Davidson's eyes it does it simply by entailing appropriate T-sentences for every sentence in the language. When the object language is included in the meta-language, the description that replaces 's' in (1) will denote the sentence that replaces 'p.' Thus, Davidson suggests, why not just read

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12 He gives a hint in *SNL*, p. 182, and has expanded the suggestion in lectures delivered at the Summer Institute of Philosophy at The University of California, Irvine, 1971.

13 *SNL*, p. 178.

14 The hint occurs in *SNL*, p. 180. Davidson provides no examples, but, as Brian Skyrms has pointed out to me, examples are easy to construct. Cf. also Martin *TT*.

'is true if and only if' as 'means that'? If we do, then a truth theory which entails a T-sentence for every sentence in our object language can be viewed as specifying the meaning of each sentence in that language.<sup>15</sup>

The proposal to read 'is true if and only if' as 'means that' is, as Davidson notes, a radical one. At first blush it is also quite absurd. "It is madness," a critic might protest, "to read 'is true if and only if' as 'means that'. They simply don't mean the same thing. The context following the first is truth-functional while the context following the second is not. An in semantics that difference makes all the difference in the world. If the context 'means that \_\_\_\_\_' is taken to be truth-functional, then all true sentences will have the same meaning. And if in the derivation of a T-sentence from a truth theory, we read 'is true if and only if' as 'means that', we would convert a valid deductive argument into a nightmarish tangle of invalidity and *non sequitur*."

The critic is right, of course. 'Means that' and 'is true if and only if' are not synonymous. Treating them as though they were would be nonsensical. However, I think there is a more sympathetic interpretation of Davidson's rather enigmatic proposal. As I would reconstruct the view, Davidson is not suggesting that talk of meaning is synonymous with talk of truth conditions. Rather, he sees the latter as *supplanting* the former for the purposes of semantic theory. He is not proposing that we define 'means that' but that we *eliminate* it. The idea is to recast our questions and theories about meaning entirely within the extensional idiom afforded by talk of truth and truth conditions. Underlying the idea is the hypothesis that what is worth saving in our informal (or pre-theoretic) views and questions about meaning can be captured well enough in a theory that does not talk of meaning at all, but only of truth, truth conditions and related notions. In swapping old questions and claims about meaning for new ones about truth, the trade is not intended to be even. The new claims are not expected to be equivalent with the old, but better. What is lost in the transition are all the obscurities and confusions to which the notion of meaning is heir. What is gained is the extensional clarity of the notion of truth, and the potential of producing a fruitful empirical theory invoking the notion. The benefits claimed in renouncing talk of meaning for talk of truth are akin to those realized in renouncing talk of possession by the devil for talk of nervous disorder. The questions that survive are more tractable; those that do not we are better off without.

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15 Cf. *T&M*, p. 309.

Among the questions about meaning which survive the proposed reform, two stand out: What does sentence *S* in language *L* mean? and: How is the meaning of a sentence determined by the meanings of its constituents? Warped over into the re-vamped semantic vocabulary they become: What truth condition for *S* is entailed by the truth theory for *L*? and: How does the truth condition for *S* depend on the truth (or satisfaction) conditions of its parts? The obvious answers to the first question survive as well. 'Snow is white' means that snow is white — which, in the recommended newspeak becomes: The truth theory for *L* entails that 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. The second question, a notorious puzzle for many theories of meaning, is answered by the truth theory itself which details how the satisfaction conditions of the parts of a sentence determine the truth conditions of the whole.

It is important to note that the mere proposal to view one theory or one set of questions as supplanting another is of little interest without a detailed defense. And with meaning as with possession by the devil, the defense will be a long story. What must be shown is that the new project leads to a fruitful, coherent, empirically supported theory. Thus it is no accident that Davidson's grammatic pronouncements are usually intermingled with his efforts to show how illuminating, empirically supported theories of truth can be given for one or another problematic area of discourse. Without some demonstration that such theories can be constructed for natural languages, the proposal to substitute talk of truth and truth conditions for talk of meaning would be jejune.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Though I am convinced that this is the most charitable (and plausible) reading of Davidson's doctrine on truth and meaning, the textual evidence is scattered and fragmentary. In *T&M* where the doctrine was first broached, Davidson put it as follows: (p. 309)

The theory of meaning will have done its work if it provides, for every sentence *s* in the language under study, a matching sentence (to replace '*p*' [in '*s* means that *p*'] that, in some way yet to be made clear, 'gives the meaning' of *s*. One obvious candidate for the matching sentence is just *s* itself, if the object language is contained in the metalanguage: otherwise a translation of *s* in the meta-language. As a final bold step, let us try treating the position occupied by '*p*' extensionally; to implement this, sweep away the obscure 'means that', provide the sentence that replaces '*p*' with a proper sentential connective, and supply the description that replaces '*s*' with its own predicate. The plausible result is

(T) *s* is T if and only if *p*.

What we require of a theory of meaning for a language *L* is that without

5. We have already noted that the sparse specification Davidson provides of what is to count as a truth theory does not insure that truth theories will much resemble their Tarskian namesakes. And for those which do not, I know of no argument that they will fulfil the second requirement on theories in empirical semantics. Certainly Davidson offers none. This lacuna is plainly a failing in Davidson's program. To fill the gap we need either a tighter specification of the class of acceptable truth theories or some argument that truth theories not built on Tarski's model will nonetheless satisfy the requirement. In what follows I will assume that this fault has been patched in the first way, and thus that acceptable truth theories are only those which follow the lead of Tarski's paradigms. These theories will pretty clearly fulfil Davidson's second requirement.

Tarski's strategy is to locate a finite list of primitive predicates, names and constructions. He would then provide for each primitive predicate a specification of its satisfaction conditions, for each primitive name a specification of its denotation, and for each construction a specification of how the satisfaction conditions or denotation of the construct depends on the satisfaction conditions or denotation of its components. Some fancy footwork is required to handle the infinite supply of variables. But, with the details worked out, truth resolves readily into satisfaction. The result is a sharp realization of the requirement that each sentence be exhibited as built up from a finite stock of basic vocabulary and constructions in such a way that the semantic properties of a sentence are determined by the semantic properties of its parts. The semantic properties in question

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appeal to any (further) semantical notions it place enough restrictions on the predicate 'is T' to entail all sentences got from schema T when 's' is replaced by a structural description of a sentence of L and 'p' by that sentence.

The tone is plainly reformist; the "obscure" 'means that' is not to be defined, it is to be swept away. This reformist theme surfaces again in *SNL*: (p. 186; emphasis added)

Making a systematic account of truth central in empirical semantics is in a way merely a matter of stating old goals more sharply. Still the line between clarification and innovation in science is blurred, and it seems likely that the change will shift priorities in linguistic research. Some problems that have dominated recent work on semantics will fade in importance: the attempt to give "the meaning" of sentences and to account for synonymy, analyticity and ambiguity. *For the first of these the theory of truth provides a kind of substitute*; the second and third become *unnecessary appendages*; the fourth reappears in a special form.

Cf. also *SNL*, p. 185; *T&M*, pp. 310-311 and p. 312.

are denotation, satisfaction and truth conditions, not meaning traditionally viewed — a switch which is of a piece with the reformist strategy lately sketched.

6. The third requirement on theories of meaning demands only passing attention. So long as we cleave to our announced intention of ignoring indexicals, demonstratives, ambiguities and non-declaratives, the sentence replacing 'p' in the schema (1) will simply be identical with the sentence whose description replaces 's' (or it will be the translation of that sentence). No problem, then, about the right side of the biconditional importing concepts foreign to the sentence named on the left.

7. On the topic of testability Davidson takes the program he advocates to earn some of its highest marks. The program's promise in this quarter is particularly impressive by contrast to the dismal performance of competing projects. A truth theory "has been characterized as issuing in an infinite flood of sentences each giving the truth conditions of a sentence . . ." To test the theory, ". . . we need only ask, in selected cases, whether what the theory avers to be the truth conditions for a sentence really are. A typical case might involve deciding whether the sentence 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white."<sup>17</sup> The proposal is starkly simple. A truth theory is to be viewed as a formalized empirical theory whose testable consequences are the infinite collection of T-sentences that the theory entails. All that is needed to test any given consequent is the ability to recognize that the biconditional is true. In favorable cases, where the meta-language contains the object language and the sentence at hand is free from ambiguity, indexicals and the rest, the test is trivial indeed. "It is no harder to test the empirical adequacy of a theory of truth than it is for a competent speaker of English to decide whether sentences like "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" are true."<sup>18</sup> There is, Davidson urges, an analogy between the testing of a truth theory and the testing of a theory of generative grammar.<sup>19</sup> A grammar yields an infinite flood of entailments of the form: S is grammatical. And a principal strategy for checking on the correctness of a grammar is to compare its pronouncements on grammaticality with the "linguistic intuitions" or pre-systematic

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17 *T&M*, p. 311.

18 *SNL*, p. 185.

19 *SNL*, pp. 185-186.

judgments speakers make on the same topic. In syntax as in truth theory, confirming the theory is in large measure a matter of verifying the consequences. The analogy extends still further, for in both cases a theorist at home in his object language is unlikely to resort to counting noses. The consequences to be verified are most of them sufficiently obvious for the theorist to rest content with a single judgment — his own. The trick in both theories comes not in testing the consequences, but in building a theory that will entail them.

When the object language and the meta-language do not overlap, testing of a truth theory is more demanding. In these cases the relation between the sentence named on the left of the T-sentence and the one occurring on the right is not mere identity. To test the theory, what the theorist must determine is that the object language sentence named is identical in truth value with the meta-language sentence with which it is paired. The technique Davidson recommends is Quine's procedure for getting on with radical translation. "We will try to notice under what conditions the alien speaker assents to or dissents from a variety of his sentences. The relevant conditions will, of course, be what we take to be the truth conditions of his sentences. We will have to assume that most of his assents are to true, and his dissents from false, sentences — an inevitable assumption since the alternative is unintelligible."<sup>20</sup>

8. There is, according to Davidson, quite a different strategy for testing putative truth theories. Essential to the strategy is the observation that truth theories provide an account of logical truth and entailment for their object language. In fact, most any theory which entails T-sentences for each sentence in a language will also entail that certain sentences in the language are true. For all the logical truths of the meta-language can be assumed to be theorems of the truth theory. Thus if *p* is a logical truth in the meta-language, and if the truth theory entails a T-sentence with *p* occurring on the right of the biconditional, then the theory will entail the sentence (of the form: *S* is true) on the left of the biconditional. And that sentence attributes truth to a sentence in the object language. Thus a truth theory will entail, for every logical truth in the object language, a sentence (in the meta-language) which asserts that it is true.

There is, then, a sense in which any theory which entails all T-sentences projects as much of the logic of the meta-language onto the object language as can be translated into the object language. However, if this is all a truth theory has to say about logical relations in

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20 *SNL*, p. 186. Cf. also *T&M*, p. 313.

the object language, the theory is not likely to be taken seriously as a theory of *logical form*. For even the trivial "truth theories" which take all instances of (1) as axioms will entail, of each logical truth in the object language, that it is true. Such trivial theories say nothing about the structure of sentences in the object language. They thus hardly count as theories of *logical form*.

Theories that follow Tarski's model will do rather better than this. Tarskian theories detail how the truth (or satisfaction) conditions of sentences depend on the truth (or satisfaction) conditions of their parts. And in so doing they not only entail of certain sentences that they are true, they also entail that *every sentence of a certain form* is true. The class of sentences thus selected can plausibly be identified with the class of logical truths in the object language. It is by virtue of entailing *generalizations* about true sentences *couched in terms of structure* that Tarski-style truth theories may be taken seriously as full-blown theories of *logical form*.

Now it is these consequences of a Tarski-style truth theory that Davidson would exploit to provide an additional empirical check on the theory. The proposed test consists in comparing the truth theory's pronouncements about logical truth (as well as entailment and logical equivalence) with the intuitions speakers offer on these matters.<sup>21</sup> The theory is confirmed when, at least for relatively simple cases, its pronouncements and the speakers' coincide.

9. Perhaps the most exciting part of Davidson's program is the contention that in doing empirical semantics (read: truth theory) we are also making headway in descriptive metaphysics. Though the contention is a theme in much of Davidson's work, I know of no place where he has discussed it in any detail in print. From the hints he gives us, I think we can reconstruct the justification he would offer for the claim as follows. In seeking a truth theory for a language or part of a language we sometimes find that the best theory requires sentences of the object language to be analyzed in a certain way. The analysis, in turn, reveals that some of our sentences have interesting, and sometimes quite controversial, sorts of ontological commitments. But if the claim that our ordinary discourse presupposes a given ontology is controversial, it is also empirically supportable. For the ontological

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21 Cf. *T&M*, p. 318: "... the theory entails not only that these sentences are true but that they will remain true under all significant rewritings of their non-logical parts. . . . It is hard to imagine how a theory of meaning could fail to read a logic into its object language to this degree; and to the extent that it does, our intuitions of logical truth, equivalence and entailment may be called upon in constructing and testing the theory."

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claims fall out of our theory of truth, and the truth theory is itself empirically testable.

The principle application Davidson makes of this idea is to be found in his discussion of sentences describing events and actions. The ontology which Davidson holds to be implicit in such sentences as

(2) Shem kicked Shaun

and

(3) Sebastian strolled through the streets of Bologna at 2 a.m.

includes not only such familiar objects as persons and cities, but also events, which are taken to be dated, spatially located particulars. The argument for this ontology turns on analyses of these sentences which contain existential quantifiers not suggested by their surface forms. On the analysis, (2) becomes

(2') (Ex) kicked (Shem, Shaun, x)<sup>22</sup>

and (3) becomes

(3') (Ex) Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x) & At (2 a.m., x).

In each case the entity whose existence is asserted is an event — a kicking in the first case and a strolling in the second.

Plainly (3') entails (4'):

(4') (Ex) Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x).

And this is as it should be, since (4') is the analysis of (4):

(4) Sebastian strolled through the streets of Bologna,

which is indeed intuitively entailed by (3). Now if we assume that Sebastian strolled through the streets of Bologna but once, i.e.

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22 Cf. *LFAS*, p. 92. For some elaboration see *EP* and *IE*.

(5) (x) (y) [[Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x) & Strolled (Sebastian, y) & Through (the streets of Bologna, y)]  $\supset$  x = y],

then, if we follow Russell's lead on unpacking definite descriptions, the strolling of Sebastian through the streets of Bologna at 2 a.m. must be identical with his strolling through the streets of Bologna, i.e.

(6) (ix) [Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x) & At (2 a.m., x)] = (ix) [Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x)].

Other accounts of events have been proposed on which the strolling of Sebastian through the streets of Bologna and the strolling of Sebastian through the streets of Bologna at 2 a.m. are distinct, even though he may have strolled these streets only once.<sup>23</sup> But, Davidson would argue, events so construed are not the entities presupposed by our *ordinary* talk of events. Those who would indulge in revisionist metaphysics may argue that a more finely individuated notion of "events" would be better, for one purpose or another, than the notion of events which takes Sebastian's strolling and his strolling at 2 a.m. to be identical. And they may be right. But the notion they urge is not *our* notion, not the notion embedded in our current way of talking about events. Our notion is the one supported by an empirically supported theory of meaning for our language. "Without an ontology of events [of the sort Davidson advocates], it does not seem possible to give a natural and acceptable account of the logical form of certain sentences of the most common sorts; it does not seem possible, that is, to show how the meanings of such sentences depend upon their composition."<sup>24</sup>

## II. Problems

10. The attraction of Davidson's program is unmistakable. It promises progress on three fronts simultaneously. Accounts of meaning, logical form and descriptive metaphysics are to be integrated in a single empirical theory. But on a closer look, this *ménage à trois* is not nearly so serene as it might at first seem.

The most obvious signs of stress appear when we contrast Davidson's account of what a truth theory *should* look like with the

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23 For example in Goldman's *Action* and Kim's *Events*.

24 *IE*, p. 218.

examples of such theories that he actually provides. A theory of truth for a language, it will be recalled, must entail an infinite supply of T-sentences, one for each sentence in the language. When the sentence at hand is a declarative, free from indexicals, etc., and when the object language is contained within the meta-language, the anticipated T-sentence will result from (1) by substituting a standard name of the sentence for 's' and the sentence itself for 'p'. Curiously, however, Davidson's treatment of action sentences in English gives us no clue on how to construct a truth theory of the sort he demands for these sentences. Consider sentences (2) and (3). If English is our meta-language, the sentences we want entailed by our theory are

(7) 'Shem kicked Shaun' is true if and only if Shem kicked Shaun

and

(8) 'Sebastian strolled through the streets of Bologna at 2 a.m.' is true if and only if Sebastian strolled through the streets of Bologna at 2 a.m.

Nothing Davidson says points the way to such a theory. What he does show us is how to construct a theory which entails some quite different sentences, *viz.*

(9) '(Ex) [Kicked (Shem, Shaun, x)]' is true if and only if (Ex) [Kicked (Shem, Shaun, x)]

and

(10) '(Ex) [Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x) & At (2 a.m., x)]' is true if and only if (Ex)[Strolled (Sebastian, x) & Through (the streets of Bologna, x) & At (2 a.m., x)].

Now it is at least arguable that (9) and (10) and the sentences named within them are not sentences of English at all. But the point I am urging is much less controversial. (2) and (3) plainly are English sentences. Any account of the semantics of action sentences must surely deal with them. Yet Davidson's proposed semantics for action sentences has not told us the first thing that, on his own account, any semantic theory must tell us. His treatment of action sentences does not yield a theory entailing (7) and (8); thus it does not tell us when (2) and (3) are true.

11. Two moves for dealing with the anomaly suggest themselves. We can either dismiss Davidson's account of action sentences for failing to fulfil the basic requirements of his program, or we can seek some reformulation of the program itself. The former strategy is plainly the less plausible. There is nothing subtle about the gap between what Davidson's program requires and what his semantics for action sentences delivers. And while it is not beyond imagining that Davidson may have missed the point of his own program, it is hardly likely that he has missed it so obviously. But we need not ground our rejection of the first move on appeals to charitable interpretation. We saw earlier that Davidson's program incorporates a proposal to replace talk of meaning with talk of truth and truth conditions. And we noted that the proposal is not to be taken seriously without a demonstration that fruitful empirical theories are fostered by its acceptance. If we dikount Davidson's theory of action sentences, we deprive his central proposal of its most detailed attempted defence.

12. It looks as though we had best explore the second move which starts from the assumption that Davidson's account of his program is misleading or incomplete. The sort of theories Davidson led us to expect (let us call them Advertised Truth Theories, or ATTs) were characterized by a pair of properties:

- (i) they entail T-sentences for each object language sentence
- (ii) they contain at most finitely many non-logical axioms.

But from his treatment of action sentences it would appear that Davidson never seriously intended to provide an ATT for those sentences of ordinary English which recount actions. Rather it is his idea to first *analyze* or *translate* these sentences, to rework them into some canonical form. An ATT is then to be provided only for the canonical counterparts of ordinary sentences. The resulting theory (let us call it a Delivered Truth Theory, or DTT) comes in two parts. The first is a function mapping sentences in the vernacular into sentences in some canonical notation. The second is an ATT for the canonical language sentences in the range of the translation function. Davidson's work on the semantics of action sentences can be viewed as an attempt to carry off the first part of this project by showing how to map action sentences in ordinary English into sentences of a canonical language whose logical apparatus is that of first order quantification theory. This done, the second part is trivial. We need only follow Tarski's lead in building a truth theory for the canonical language.

This revised account of the sort of theory Davidson seeks has the virtue of reconciling his program with his practice. But there is little reason to be encouraged. For the revised account also renders suspect

almost all of the argument advanced in favor of the program. That argument was designed to show that theory of truth applied to a natural language would be an empirical semantic theory for the language. This was to be done by showing that truth theory would satisfy the four *desiderata* proposed for semantic theory. Throughout the argument, however, truth theories were taken to be directly applied to the object language. There was no mention of translating into canonical notation. So let us now ask whether the two stage theories of the sort Davidson really provides will satisfy the *desiderata*. It is my contention that they will not. I will work from the bottom up, considering first the matter of testability.

When we expected a truth theory to apply directly to the sentences of our object language, the principal strategy for testing the theory seemed perfectly straightforward. Simply test the entailed T-sentences against the judgments of competent speakers. For DTTs, however, the strategy crumbles, since a DTT does not entail T-sentences for sentences in the vernacular. It does entail T-sentences for canonical language sentences, however. And if we add the general claim that the paraphrase function preserves truth value, a DTT will also entail what we may dub T\*-sentences. These are substitution instances of (1) with a vernacular sentence replacing 's' and its canonical translation replacing 'p'. But neither T-sentences for the canonical language nor T\*-sentences will be of much use in testing the theory against intuition. Both make essential use of canonical notation, and it is hardly likely that competent speakers of the vernacular will have any intuitions to offer as to their truth. So it seems that appeal to speakers' judgments about T-sentences is of no help in testing truth theories as delivered.

Here, I think, the best Davidsonian reply might run as follows: "Granted, intuitions are of no use in testing the sort of truth theory that has been offered for action sentences in English. But this is not a serious obstacle to testing these theories. Intuitions, after all, are only a shortcut. What is important is not that T\*-sentences be testable *against intuition*, but only that they be testable in some way or other. And, of course, they are. For, while it is true that the average speaker will not understand T\* -sentences because of their unfamiliar right hand side, nonetheless we, the theorists, understand T\* -sentences. So we can simply treat DTTs as we would any truth theory written in a meta-language distinct from the object language. We can use the techniques of radical translation to test whether the vernacular sentences named on the left of T\* -sentences have the same truth value as the canonical sentences occurring to the right. Insofar as they do, the theory which entails the T\* -sentences is confirmed."

This answer nicely sidesteps the problem posed by the failure of intuition to provide a test for DTTs. But there are problems about the

testability of DTTs that are harder to avoid. One of these is the problem presented by the choice of canonical language. What are the empirical controls on this choice? How can we decide, empirically, which canonical language is the right one? Some constraint is imposed by the requirement that the canonical language admit of an ATT. But even with this restriction there will be many candidates for the role of canonical language, and it would seem there is no empirical way of deciding which is the right one.

To illustrate how serious the problem is, let us take a look at an alternative theory of action sentences, built on an alternative canonical language. Take the logical apparatus of the language to be largely identical with the apparatus Davidson employs — *viz.* the quantifiers, connectives and appurtenances of first order quantification theory. Next, introduce into our canonical language quotation mark names for the sentences in the fragment of English we are stalking. Finally, introduce a single one place predicate, 'Wahr', and explain it as follows: 'Wahr' is a predicate true of certain English sentences. A canonical sentence consisting of 'Wahr' followed by the name of an object language sentence has the same truth value as the object language sentence named. Let it not be protested that introducing predicates into our language in this way is unacceptable. For it is by a wholly analogous procedure that Davidson introduces his three place predicate 'kicked' as well as such oddities as his two place predicates 'At' and 'Through'. Our grasp of these unfamiliar lexical items is secured by pairing canonical sentences containing them with vernacular sentences whose truth value they share. Given this mode of explanation for unfamiliar predicates in the canonical language, coextension between vernacular and canonical sentences is secured, as it were, by definition. I do not suggest that there is anything illegitimate in all this. My point is only that 'At' and 'Wahr' are in the same boat.

The translation function from English to my canonical language is trivial. The translation of a sentence is formed by appending its quote name to 'Wahr'. The ATT is equally transparent. For those sentences in the range of the paraphrase function, the truth theory requires only two axioms. The first gives the denotation of each quote name; the second provides truth conditions for our canonical paraphrases.

- (A).  $(n)(y)[\text{if } n = \text{''}\wedge y \wedge \text{''} \text{ and } y \text{ is a sentence in English, then Denotation}(n) = y].$
- (B).  $(S)(n)[\text{if } n \text{ is the quote name of an English sentence and } S = \text{'Wahr'} \wedge n, \text{ then } S \text{ is true iff Wahr}(\text{Denotation}(n))].$

Now the point of this peculiar account of the semantics of action sentences is that on the proposed strategy for testing DTTs, it does just as well as Davidson's account. In structure the accounts are parallel; moreover, both entail the appropriate T\*-sentences. We have no empirical way of deciding which canonical language to use, no way of empirically deciding which theory is the right one.

There is yet another difficulty with the idea of invoking T\*-sentences to test truth theories. To get at it, assume that the problem of choosing a canonical language has been resolved, that we have found some empirically motivated way to select among alternatives. What would a test of a DTT embodying the selected canonical language be like? We could, of course, test whether a proffered truth theory actually did entail the requisite T\*-sentences. But this is hardly an empirical test since the question is a formal one. What else remains? Well, assuming that the proposed theory does entail suitable T\*-sentences, we might think to test whether these entailments are true. But on second thought that is a perverse idea. For we already *know* that they are true. A T\*-sentence results from substituting the name of a vernacular sentence for 's' in (1) and the canonical translation of the sentence named for 'p'. Clearly, if the sentence replacing 'p' is the translation of the vernacular sentence, the two must have the same truth value. This much follows from the notion of correct translation. And if the sentence replacing 'p' in (1) has the same truth value as the sentence whose name replaces 's', the substitution instance will of course be true. It begins to look as though the idea of using T\*-sentences to test a truth theory is a hopeless muddle. If a putative theory does not entail T\*-sentences, it is not a DTT at all; if it does entail them, it can't fail to meet the test, since T\*-sentences can't fail to be true. And we know T\*-sentences are true without knowing anything at all about the language under study. Note too that a parallel argument applies to ATTs, the sort of theories Davidson had promised. For these also the principal test of the theory was provided by testing the truth of the entailed T-sentences. But as in the case of DTTs, such "tests" are no tests at all. If a theory fails to entail the required T-sentences, it is not an ATT. And given the characterization of T-sentences, they cannot fail to be true. If a theory is an ATT at all, it cannot fail to be "confirmed." So even if we had been given the sort of truth theory Davidson advertised, we could not exploit the T-sentences they entail in order to test the theory. The conclusion to be drawn is unmistakable. Davidson's remarks on testing truth theories via their entailed T-sentences amount to no more than a philosophical farrago.

Before turning to some other potential tests for truth theories, let us pause to set straight another confusion in Davidson's account of the use of T-sentences. It will be recalled that Davidson saw an analogy

between truth theory and grammar in that both are most readily testable by probing intuitions. In grammar the intuitions concern the grammaticality of sentences, in truth theory they concern the truth of T-sentences. This alleged analogy is an illusion. We have already seen that for testing either ATTs or DTTs intuitions are quite useless. What is more, the intuitions of grammaticality probed by a grammarian are staggeringly complex and plainly dependent on syntactic competence. A theory or system of rules which came close to describing these intuitions would be a monumental achievement. No such Herculean effort is required to specify the class of T-sentences. Indeed, Davidson's project pre-supposes that we have a relatively straightforward *theory independent* specification of T-sentences, since it is part of the definition of 'truth theory' that the theory entail T-sentences. As Edwin Martin has noted, the only challenge in producing a truth theory of the sort Davidson requires is provided by the tacit demand that truth theory be a standard deductive theory.<sup>25</sup> If the sort of generative theories that have figured prominently in contemporary grammar are allowed, the contrast between truth theory and grammar is stark: the former is trivial, the latter is not.

13. The proposal that we test a DTT by checking the T-sentences it entails has led to a dead end. So let us turn to the other strategy Davidson proposes for testing semantic theories. This, it will be recalled, is to test the theory's pronouncements about logical truth, entailment and equivalence against the intuitions offered by speakers. The idea needs a bit of reworking to accommodate our revised account of the structure of a Davidsonian theory. The ATT component of a DTT will attribute logical properties and relations only to canonical language sentences. By assuming the translation function preserves these properties and relations, however, we can attribute them, derivatively, to sentences in the vernacular. These are the attributions to be tested against speakers' intuitions.

Here, finally, we have a proposal which succeeds in empirically distinguishing Davidson's theory of action sentences from the competitor we cooked up above. Davidson's theory finds a rich array of entailments among action sentences and does tolerably well at capturing our intuitions. The putative competition finds *no* entailments among action sentences and thus radically fails to capture our intuitions. So it looks as though DTT may after all satisfy at least one of the *desiderata* set for semantic theories: they are empirically testable. But there remains something disquieting in this. It would

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25 Martin, *TT*.

appear that speakers' "semantic" intuitions provide the *only* empirical check on a DTT. And if this is the only way empirical phenomena bear on the theory, then the theory might plausibly be viewed as no more than a theory of semantic intuition, that is, a theory which seeks to describe, predict, and perhaps explain the judgments speakers make about entailment, equivalence and logical truth. There is nothing disresponsible about such goals. What is puzzling is why we should insist that a theory of semantic intuition be urged into the idiosyncratic mold Davidson adopts. Why should a theory of semantic intuition be built by mapping object language sentences to sentences in a canonical language which admits of a truth theory? Would it not be more reasonable to seek the simplest and most natural theory we could find which would correctly capture semantic intuitions?<sup>26</sup> The only reason Davidson suggests for coaxing the theory into his prescribed form is that in that form the theory will satisfy the remaining requirements on a theory of meaning. So let us proceed up the list of requirements.

14. When we took Davidson at his word on the structure of the semantic theories he was advocating, the third requirement posed no problem. If the specification of meaning (or truth condition) for a sentence is provided by the sentence itself, it will surely have drawn upon just the same concepts. But we have seen that Davidson is not to be taken at his word. In the sort of theory he actually constructs, the truth conditions for a sentence are provided not by the sentence itself but by its regimented canonical counterpart. And, in the case of action sentences at least, there is little plausibility to the claim that a sentence and its counterpart invoke the same concepts. Neither a quantifier nor a three place predicate appear in (2); both appear in (2'). The conceptual disparity between (3) and (3') is, if anything, greater still. Nor will it do to argue that (2') and (3') reflect the concealed conceptual structure of (2) and (3). For such a contention must rest on the claim that analyses like (2') and (3') are mandated by an acceptable theory of meaning or logical form. And the acceptability of the theory is the question currently at hand.

15. It is equally dubious that the theories Davidson produces satisfy the second requirement on a theory of meaning. What is required is

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26 An obvious idea is to design a theory of semantic intuitions to mesh as comfortably as possible with a theory of syntactic intuitions. Current views on what such a combined theory would look like are sharply divided. But I know of no serious work on syntax that would urge a syntactic theory into the very restricted mold Davidson requires.

that the theory show each sentence to be built from a finite stock of parts in such a way that the semantic properties of the sentence are determined by the semantic properties of its parts. Here again, Davidson's defense of his program rests on deceptive advertising. For while a Tarski-style ATT will pretty clearly fulfil the requirement, Davidson does not seriously propose to provide Tarski-style theories for natural language. The theories he provides *contain* an ATT for the regimented language, and thus show how semantic properties of the regimented sentences depend on the semantic properties of their parts. But there is no interesting sense in which it does the same for the unregimented sentences that are mapped to canonical sentences. To underscore the failing, consider the perverse alternative theory of action sentences concocted a few pages back. In structure the theory parallels Davidson's. Both map natural language sentences to canonical language sentences and both contain a truth theory showing how the semantic properties of canonical sentences depend on the semantic properties of their parts. Yet it would be absurd to suggest that my theory satisfies the second requirement.

16. The remaining requirement stipulates that a theory of meaning must specify the meaning of each sentence in the language. In this quarter as elsewhere, Davidson urges that we trade talk of meaning for talk of truth conditions. If the proposal is adopted, we need only insist that our semantic theory specify the truth condition of each sentence in our object language. So construed, the requirement is indeed met by such theories as Davidson's account of action sentences. The translation function preserves truth value (largely by fiat) and the truth theory component gives truth conditions for each canonical language sentence. But note that this is a satisfactory fulfilment of the first requirement *only* if the proposal to trade talk of meaning for talk of truth is accepted. And the proposal is to be accepted only if it leads to fruitful, empirically supported theories. In light of our recent reflections, Davidson's defense of the proposal looks frail indeed. The theory of action sentences he produces as an illustration of the gains to be reaped in trading talk of meaning for talk of truth violates two of the requirements set for a semantic theory. The only empirical phenomena it purports to capture are semantic intuitions. And capturing these is a job which in all likelihood can be handled more economically by a theory whose structure is not dictated in advance. If the defense of the revisionist proposal falters, as it plainly has, then the theories Davidson produces will not satisfy the first requirement on a theory of meaning — they will not tell us what the sentences of our object language mean.

17. It is time to review the course of our argument and draw some conclusions. We began by noting a divergence between the sort of theory Davidson's programmatic writings had let us to expect and the sort he actually produces when attending to the semantics of action and event sentences. Two paths seemed open for dealing with the anomaly. We might either reject his account of action sentences or reconstrue the program to fit Davidson's practice. Both paths led to grief. The former deprived Davidson of his most carefully elaborated attempt to show that his program would lead to a fruitful empirical theory. We were left with little reason to think truth theory could be done at all for most of natural language. And without some reason to think that it *can* be done, the centrally important Davidsonian proposal to trade talk of meaning for talk of truth is inane. The latter path led to theories that do not satisfy Davidson's requirements for a theory of meaning. Theories like the one Davidson provides for actions sentences are, by his own (quite plausible) requirements, not theories of meaning at all. The conclusion I would draw from all this is that Davidson's program for doing empirical semantics is a thoroughgoing failure. Theories of truth are not theories of meaning.

The collapse of Davidson's semantic program dims the hope that we are on the right path in seeking empirical accounts of logical form and ontological commitment in a language. Both the account of logical form and the account of descriptive metaphysics were portrayed as sitting on the shoulders of truth theory. They derived their empirical support at second hand, by following from a theory of meaning which was itself empirically supported. But since Davidson has not pointed the way to an empirical theory of meaning, his quantificational account of the logical form of English sentences is without empirical support. Much the same conclusion must follow for his "coarse grained" account of events. Whatever the virtues of construing events in this way may be, facilitating an empirical account of the semantics of English is not among them. Yet if Davidson's program is to be consigned to the scrap heap, I think there are pieces of it that are not beyond saving. Oddly, one of these is the lately disparaged theory of events, which holds promise of considerable utility in a radically different theory of logical form. In my final section I will sketch the salvage operation I have in mind. To lay the groundwork, I will say something about where I think Davidson went astray.

### III. Salvage

18. The faults we found with Davidson's program in the previous section were largely idiosyncratic to Davidson's project. But, by my

lights, there is a more fundamental fault which Davidson's project shares with many others. This is the idea that a theory of meaning should be intrinsically interwoven with a theory of logical form. The roots of the idea run deep. The 18th century empiricists were never quite bold enough to urge that *all* knowledge derived from experience. In one guise or another certain areas of knowledge were exempted; and knowledge of logic was almost always one of these areas. After Kant, it became common to analyze or account for at least some of our alleged *a priori* knowledge in terms drawn from grammar and the study of language. With the Vienna Circle, the tradition flowered into an explicitly linguistic account of *a priori* knowledge and necessary truth. In seeking to wring a theory of logical form out of an empirical theory of meaning, Davidson places himself squarely within this tradition.

On my view, this philosophical tradition has built one mistake upon another. Logic is no more intrinsically involved with meaning than is biology, and linguistics is no more closely tied to logic than it is to physics. More fundamental still, the early empiricists were mistaken in refusing to walk the last mile; knowledge of logic is no less empirical than knowledge of physics. This is no place for a full-blown defense of my radical empiricism. But there are at least two lines of defense which touch directly on the principal theme of this essay. One of these is the notorious lack of success that has beset all attempts to develop linguistic theories of logical truth and logical form. Davidson's attempt is the latest in a long line of failures. A second defense rests on the claim that once we stop trying to arrange a shotgun marriage between meaning and logic, the pieces of philosophical accounts of both subjects begin to fall into place. Let us consider each subject in turn.

19. Meaning is the harder of the two since there is neither a widely accepted paradigm of a theory of meaning nor any generally accepted list of those things that an empirical theory of meaning ought to do. Here Davidson has done yeoman service by insisting that a formulation of *desiderata* should precede a formulation of theory. The four *desiderata* he proposes are surely plausible ones. And if we do not tack on the further requirement that an empirical theory of meaning provide an account of logical form, Davidson's *desiderata* may not be all that hard to satisfy — not by a theory of truth, to be sure, but by an explicit and motivated theory of *translation*. The sort of theory I have in mind would provide an explicit account of the skill exercised by an able translator; it would specify the translation(s) in our meta-language of an arbitrary object language sentence uttered in an arbitrary context. The demand that our theory of translation be motivated amounts to the requirement that it be paired with some general account of the business of translation, a general theory which

enables us to judge whether a proposed translation manual is a correct one.<sup>27</sup> Such a theory would satisfy each of Davidson's *desiderata* in quite a natural way. It would "give the meaning" of every sentence, or at least of every utterance of every sentence. It is hard to imagine how a translation manual could fail to show how the meaning of a sentence depended upon the meaning of its parts, since surely the translation of a sentence is at least in part a function of the translations of its parts. Conceptual economy will provide no problem. Indeed, I suspect the requirement will be more or less automatically fulfilled, since the best handle we have on the concepts invoked in a foreign sentence is provided by its translation into our native language. Finally, to tell us how to test a translation manual, we must rely on a general theory of translation.

I am not urging that a theory of translation exhausts the work to be done by an empirical theory of meaning. (Though I would not find this an unwelcome conclusion.) There may well be other defensible clusters of *desiderata* which set the goals for different sorts of theories with equal claim to the title 'theory of meaning'. What I would stress is the fact that tractable projects in the empirical study of meaning begin to appear once meaning has been divorced from logical truth.

20. Let us turn now to logical truth, entailment and related notions. What account is to be given of them when they have been set free from meaning? I think there are two quite distinct ideas in circulation on this topic. Both seem to me to be viable, though one suffers from a quite radical mislabeling. One of these has already turned up amidst the tangle of ideas in Davidson's program. This is the project of building a theory of "semantic intuitions." Speakers seem to have tolerably consistent intuitions about the logical truth of sentences in their language; they also have intuitions about entailments and logical equivalences among sentences. The thought occurs to build a system of rules which would describe this body of intuitions, much as a grammar describes the speaker's syntactic intuitions. A still better thought is to merge the rules for syntactic and semantic intuitions into a single unified theory. Whether merged with a syntactic theory or not, a theory of semantic intuitions will best be idealized, to abstract from memory limitations and such. The resulting theory will find logical truths and entailment relations even among sentences too long and complicated to admit of any firm intuitive assessment. We might

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<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most widely known essay toward this goal is to be found in the early chapters of Quine's *Word*. For some critical reaction, see Grandy, *Reference*.

then take the class of sentences selected by our theory to be the logical truths in our object language, and we might take the proper class of pairs selected by the theory as an explication of entailment in our object language. We might, that is, except that to do so would be something of a bad philosophical pun. For there is no reason to believe that the sentences our theory selects as "logical truths" are true at all, and no reason to believe that "entailment" so construed preserves truth. Better then to take the theory of semantic intuitions as a bit of psychological theory segregating classes of sentences which, for reasons not yet understood, are judged to be similar in certain respects.<sup>28</sup> Logical truths properly so-called are the business of quite a different sort of theory.

21. The sort of theory I have in mind takes logical truths to be a species of empirical truths. Logic, on this view, is like other empirical sciences in that it aims at specifying a broad and systematically related class of empirical truths. Unlike other sciences, however, logic exploits the truth predicate and quantification over sentences to facilitate the formulation of generalizations not otherwise easily expressible. The laws of logic are generalizations asserting that each sentence of a certain type is true. The types, in turn, are characterized by appeal to grammatical structure. Choice among competing theories is to be effected as with other empirical theories by determining which logical theory best integrates with the remainder of received science to produce the most explanatorily powerful total theory of nature. On this view we have as much reason to believe in the truth of the sentences designated 'logical truths' by our theory as we have to believe in the theorems of our physical theory. Both beliefs are sanctioned by the role of the appropriate theory in our broader theory of nature.

I have elsewhere attempted an extended exposition of this radical empiricist account of logical theory.<sup>29</sup> I will not reiterate here. One point in the exposition, however, is crucial to the promised salvage of a bit of Davidson's program. This is the observation that, in the course of his research, the logician will sometimes find ordinary language unsuitable to the purposes of his theory. His response, like that of any empirical scientist, is to forge new locutions which are more amenable to the formulation of smooth, empirically useful theory. Thus, for example, the regimented language of quantification theory is to be

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28 For a less hurried discussion of the theory of semantic intuitions, see my *LFNL*.

29 Cf. *LFNL*.

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viewed as *supplanting* the tangled web of English constructions invoking such terms as ‘each’, ‘every’, ‘any’, and their various devices for cross reference, just as talk of uniform and diform motion was supplanted by the more felicitous idiom of classical physics. Quine and others have in fact championed the cause of the vocabulary of quantification theory as logical vocabulary enough for all of empirical science. If Quine is right, the sparse language of quantification theory will be the sole organon for all science. The view has its undeniable attractions, which derive from the attractions of quantification theory — simplicity, consistency, and completeness. But many, myself included, would contend that it is utopian to expect to remold all of science within the narrow vocabulary Quine recommends. It is just here that Davidson’s account of events can be brought to bear as a defense of Quine’s quantificationalist doctrine. For Davidson has shown that by postulating events of a certain sort, quantificational language can be used to express what had previously seemed beyond its reach. Davidson’s analysis makes it plausible that we can paraphrase much of our ordinary talk about events into the antiseptic idiom of quantifiers and truth functions.

This use of Davidson’s analysis has a very un-Davidsonian motivation. Davidson offers his analysis as part of a theory aimed at describing ordinary language. He eschews “interest in regimentation or improvement.”<sup>30</sup> In the use I am urging, the Davidsonian paraphrases are to be viewed as *replacing* ordinary talk of events and *improving* on it. Thus there is no prospect of invoking the analysis in defense of a thesis in *descriptive* metaphysics. There is, however, prospect for viewing the analysis as a piece of *real* metaphysics. For surely if we are to quantify over “coarse grained” events in the best canonical formulation of our theory of nature, that is the very best reason to think that such events really exist.

July 1975

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30 A&R, p. 145.

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