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CONCEPTUAL RELATIVISM

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Two radically different views of conceptual relativism have been defended in recent years. According to one, Davidson's, the very idea of a conceptual scheme—and, therefore, the doctrine of conceptual relativism, which asserts that different thinkers may possess different conceptual schemes and thus live in (at least) different mental worlds—is objectionable.[1] As Davidson sees it, different people may possess different languages and thus describe the world differently, but their languages are mutually translatable and the assertions they make are true or false by virtue of a correspondence (or lack of such) with a common world.[2] The alternative view, accepted most fully, perhaps, by Hilary Putnam but accepted in part by Nelson Goodman and others,[3] is that conceptual relativism is a sound doctrine, that people with different schemes do indeed construct their own realities, and that there is no neutral, "ready made" world by reference to which the assertions of different thinkers are properly assessed.

It seems to me that neither of these alternatives is correct; the truth is approximately in the middle. Like Davidson, I believe that there is just one world and that matter-of-factual truth is, at bottom, a matter of correspondence. On the other hand, I am convinced that different people may conceive of the world in fundamentally different ways and that, properly understood, there is nothing philosophically objectionable in the idea of alternative conceptual schemes. I shall attempt to defend my view on these matters by commenting critically

on the alternatives I oppose.

The strength of Davidson's case depends partly on the obscurity of his target, for the idea of a conceptual scheme has not been adequately clarified by philosophers who honor it. Davidson himself doesn't pretend to have a clear understanding of the idea he is attacking; his point, really, is that no one has such an understanding. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, he does his best to make sense of the idea. His provisional supposition is that people with different conceptual schemes have different languages and that if people have the same conceptual scheme, they either have the same language or have mutually translatable languages. (He also seems to suppose that if the conceptual schemes are different, the languages they are associated with are not only different but mutually untranslatable.[4]) He later plays with two common metaphors: one, that conceptual schemes "organize" something (experience, possibly); and two, that they "fit" something (possibly the world or, again, experience).

I shall argue, later on, that his way of characterizing a conceptual scheme is not fully satisfactory. It is, nevertheless, an initially plausible characterization, for the doctrine of conceptual relativism is often defended by reference to languages and to the supposed impossibility, sometimes, of providing faithful translations in one language for typical utterances in another. In addition to being an initially plausible characterization for a significantly dark philosophical notion, its limitations, when exposed, provide the basis for a better conception, one that makes conceptual relativism a much more attractive doctrine.

Davidson's provisional supposition, to repeat, is that the conceptual schemes associated with two languages are different if, and presumably only if, those languages are not mutually translatable. Although this idea is initially plausible, it is quickly rendered dubious by a currently favored notion of translation. This currently favored notion was developed by Quine in his discussion of translational indeterminacy, and anyone who accepts it will probably feel compelled to conclude at once that different conceptual schemes do not exist and never will exist. The reason for this is that Quine's notion of a translation of one language into another is, in spite of all the qualifications he introduces, a significantly weak relation—so weak that a theoretically acceptable translation manual will no doubt exist for any two languages or dialects, at least if they are comparably rich.[5]

A manual of this kind provides a systematic correlation between appropriate segments ("words") of the relevant verbal behaviors; and although a systematic correlation adequate as a translation must satisfy reasonable constraints, all the constraints that have been suggested as reasonable would seem to allow more than one translation manual for any two full-blown languages. This, substantially, is "translational indeterminacy": acceptable translations are always relative to a translation manual; more than one such manual always exists; consequently, no translation is correct in a nonrelative (or "absolute") sense.[6]

As far as I can tell, Davidson does not share Quine's view of translation, but he confesses to the belief that something is a language only if it is translatable into ours. He acknowledges, however, that this belief "ought to emerge as the conclusion of an argument"; and he proceeds with the argument of his paper. Since his argument is developed in a somewhat casual way, with various twists, turns and off-the-cuff remarks, it is worth observing that the conclusion his argument supports is not (and perhaps isn't intended to be) this particular belief. The conclusion is, rather, a more complex contention amounting to something like this:

> Any claim to the effect that a system of behavior is (a) language, (b) not translatable into ours, and (c) associated with a conceptual scheme is false.

Since Davidson is probably supposing that a language translatable into ours is not (or is not reasonably said to be) associated with an "alternative" conceptual scheme, the conclusion he reaches is, if sound, a plausible refutation of conceptual relativism.

Davidson's argument for the contention above has the general logical structure of a *reductio ad absurdum* applied to two cases. The cases are given by the supposition that language x is not translatable into language y just in case either (a) x is wholly untranslatable in y or (b) x is partially untranslatable into y and partially translatable into it. Davidson's argument for the first case rests on one of the standard metaphors used to characterize a conceptual scheme—namely, that a conceptual scheme is something that "fits" reality or perhaps experience. Something satisfying this condition must be "largely true," Davidson says; yet according to "our best intuition as to how the concept of truth is used," we cannot "divorce the notion of truth from that of translation."[7] We cannot, therefore, suppose that a

language wholly untranslatable into ours is associated with a conceptual scheme. And this is contrary to our initial assumption. Davidson's argument for the other case is based on the premiss that even a partial translation of a language into ours can succeed only if speakers of that language share a good many (perhaps most) of our beliefs and concepts; a translation scheme that doesn't satisfy this condition is impossible. (I take it that Davidson assumes here that if a language x is translatable into ours, a translation scheme must exist at least potentially, so that there is a significant degree of shared beliefs between speakers of x and us.) Yet if there is such a sharing of beliefs and concepts, the two languages are not (contrary to our initial assumption) associated with alternative conceptual schemes. Consequently, any claim to the effect that a "language" either wholly or only partially untranslatable into ours is associated with an alternative conceptual scheme must be false.

I think it is fair to say that there are several points of weakness in Davidson's argument. As he understands conceptual relativism, the supposition associated with first case is the important one to refute—the supposition, namely, that a language x is wholly untranslatable into a language y.[8] Yet the key premisses Davidson uses in refuting this supposition are both extremely dubious. The first is dubious because it places undue weight on a mere metaphor, that of a conceptual scheme "fitting" something. Since there is nothing initially implausible in the idea that an alternative conceptual scheme may deserve to be rejected because it provides an erroneous picture of the world, we can't be expected just to assume that the metaphor of fitting is applicable in all cases; we need a compelling argument, which Davidson doesn't supply. The second premiss is dubious because it is far from evident that the predicate "true" has anything to do with translation.[9] When we say that an assertion, remark, or belief is true, presumably we mean that the relevant objects are as they are asserted, remarked, or believed to be. Our meaning here concerns the relation between something linguistic or cognitive (the assertion or belief) and certain objects in the world—and this relation is independent of dictionaries and translation manuals. Davidson might be prepared to support this second premiss with a careful, detailed argument, but until he does so, his case against conceptual relativism will remain significantly weak.

As I mentioned earlier, Davidson finds it difficult to make sense of the idea of a language that cannot be translated into our language.

If one thinks of translation as he or even Quine does, Davidson's view is difficult to avoid even if one is unimpressed by the argument I have been discussing. To provide a fair assessment of conceptual relativism, we should therefore spend a little time considering whether a stricter notion of translation can be found or constructed.

Benjamin Lee Whorf's essays would appear to be a natural place to look for such a notion.[10] As Davidson observes, however, Whorf is not as helpful as one might wish. After claiming that Hopi incorporates a metaphysics so alien to ours that Hopi and English cannot be "calibrated," Whorf does not hesitate to use English to "convey the contents" of sample Hopi sentences.[11] Whorf unquestionably does this, but should we agree with Davidson that in "conveying the contents" of Hopi sentences Whorf is offering a translation of those sentences? The right answer, I believe, is "yes and no." Whorf believed that some native American languages are so different from English that sentences of one could at best be "crudely paraphrased" in terms of the others. Yet he sometimes calls these crude paraphrases "translations." A sympathetic reading of Whorf makes it advisable to think of two senses of "translation," a strong and a weak one. Whorf would presumably allow that all languages are translatable (into English, at least[12]) in the weak sense of being crudely paraphrasable into it. But he would deny that they are translatable into it in a more exacting sense, one involving a word-by-word translation or one attributing, say, a subject-predicate structure to the non-English sentence.

Whorf says of Nootka "the sentence without subject or predicate is the only type."[13] In fact, he says "Nootka has no parts of speech; the simplest utterance is a sentence...." For the Nootka sentence *tl'imshaya'isita'itlma,* Whorf offers "he invites people to a feast" as a "translation," but he complains that this translation "falsely splits the sentence into subject and predicate." Actually, he says, the native sentence is a complex of simpler sentences, with no nonsentential parts:

> It begins with the event of 'boiling or cooking,' *tl'imsh*; then comes = *ya* ('result') = 'cooked'; then -*'is* ('eating') = 'eating cooked food'; then -*ita* ('those who do') = 'eaters of cooked food'; then -*'itl* ('going for'); then -*ma*, sign of third-person indicative, giving *tl'imshaya'isita'itlma*, which

> answers to the crude paraphrase, 'he, or somebody, goes for (invites) eaters of cooked food.'[14]

These words by Whorf need careful, sympathetic treatment, for they certainly don't bear out this claim that the smallest Nooka utterance is a sentence. On the other hand, he does identify both a "translation" (which he says is bad) and a more complicated and revealing "crude paraphrase" of it. He seems unable to produce a good, revealing, symbol-by-symbol translation. Evidently, he doesn't think that such a translation is possible.

Why does Whorf believe in conceptual relativism (or his version of it)? The answer is that he has mastered and thus understands several native American languages which he cannot correlate closely with English or other Indo-European languages. As Davidson observes, he says they don't "calibrate." Whorf's complaints about "calibration" raise a problem rather than resolve one, but every reader interested in "conceptual schemes" must find them suggestive. One point should be clear at the outset, however: Whorf's inability to correlate Hopi or Nootka with English in a very close way—or even to give them a Davidson-style "interpretation" in an English (or any other) metalanguage—doesn't even faintly suggest that he does not really understand them, or that his understanding of them is in any way limited. He understands them thoroughly—as he understands English—if he possess the relevant competence in their use. This competence is adequately is adequately shown if he can communicate successfully with native speakers, responding appropriately to their utterances, and so on.

The fact that Whorf cannot correlate segments of, say, Nootka with segments of English in a way that would provide more than what he would call a "loose paraphrase" of sentences of one in terms of the other does not, of course, prove that no such correlation exists. On the other hand, his inability to provide such a correlation may provide good evidence that there is no "natural" correlation between them—no correlation that he would take to provide a good translation. I think there is something intuitively important about this sort of "natural" correlation, but the problem is to make sense of such a thing.

If one considers that languages seem more or less similar to English and that the notion of translation as both Quine and Davidson understand it does not admit of degrees (according to Quine, you either

have a translation manual or you don't; according to Davidson, you either have a truth-theory or you don't) an alternative account of translation seems imperative. Fortunately, an approach to such an account is suggested by Nelson Goodman's procedure in his classic paper, "On Likeness of Meaning."[15] Although Goodman is even more wary about "intensions" than Quine or Davidson, he worked out in that paper a purely extensional means of estimating likeness of meaning between predicates, terms, or referential expressions generally. His criterion, or test, is applicable only to expressions of a single language, but I think it can be extended to expressions of different languages.

Goodman's criterion is based on the distinction between the primary and the secondary extension of a term of predicate. The denotation of a term is its primary extension; its secondary extension is the denotation of compounds in which it occurs. Goodman introduced this distinction to point out a clear, extensional difference between terms that have, like "centaur" and "unicorn", the same extension but differ in meaning. The difference he identifies depends on differences in secondary extension, for the compound "centaur-description" differs in denotation from the corresponding compound "unicorn description." Such differences permit one to offer an extensional definition of synonymy—namely, that the referential expressions A and B are synonymous just when they have the same primary and secondary extensions. Goodman notes that, if the compounds conforming to the pattern "an A description that is not a B description" are deemed relevant to the definition, different terms will invariably be rendered nonsynonymous. On the other hand, if we consider the variety of compounds in which two expressions have the same secondary extension, we can speak of the extent to which those expressions are similar in meaning. The idea is that they are similar in meaning to the degree that their primary and secondary extensions coincide.

To extend this apparatus to expressions belonging to more than one language, we might begin by attending to the continuity between idiolects, dialects, and languages. Roughly speaking, a language (ordinarily considered) is just an aggregate of dialects, which are in turn aggregates of subdialects and eventually idiolects. Although idiolects of different dialects belonging to a common language may differ in significant ways, speakers of those idiolects may have no trouble understanding one another—in fact, they may fail to notice that they

are actually speaking different dialects. Now, as philologists like to emphasize, most European languages are classifiable as dialects of Indo-European. From this point of view, "rouge" and "bleu" differ from "red" and "blue" in fundamentally the same way as my midwestern "idea"s differ from my students' "ideeyer"s: they count as replicas of the same Indo-European word. Of course, dialects do not exactly coincide in total vocabulary, but many differences that are glaring to someone new to a certain dialect (appearing to involve different words) often turn out to be owing mainly to peculiarities of pronounciation. A striking example of this is the ancient Greek ἔργον (or "ergon") and the English "work." The former, I am told, was originally begun with a digamma, which had a sound we would represent by "w"; thus, "ergon" was originally something like "wergon." But the ancient gamma (or "g") is a voiced version of the consonant that has a k-sound when unvoiced, so "wergon" is just a variant of "werkon," where the terminal "-on" is merely a Greek ending that, in this case, has no semantic significance and can be ignored for comparative purposes. This leaves us with "werk," which appears as "Werk" in German (where it is pronounced *verk*) and "work" in English, the Greek "e" (or epsilon) gradating into the English "o" as it does in the move from "held" and "hold." Thus, in spite of their striking difference in appearance, "ergon" and "work" are fundamentally the same Indo-European word—tokens, as it were, of a common type. In this regard "ergon" and "work" are jointly comparable to countless (almost) other pairs, of which "pêcherie" and "fishery" are obvious instances.

When we consider modern European languages, we might say that, just as the sound "pen" is very dissimilar from its printed replicas, the sound or shape of "la plume de ma tante" is very different from the sound or shape of "my aunt's pen." Nevertheless, any competent speaker of French and English will allow that these expressions have the same primary extension and significantly similar secondary extensions. "La plume de ma tante" is, for example, a pen-description and an aunt-description; and "my aunt's pen" is both *une description-de-la-plume* and *une description-de-la-tante*. Like an actor who is the master of six accents—Manhattan, Bostonian, upperclass Texan, Oxford-University-English, and so on—such a speaker might vary the pronounciation of Indo-European from French to English. Of course, these different dialects will possess many of their own distinctive words or classificatory labels—words that are not "mispronounced"

in other dialects—but this is characteristic of dialects generally: dialects of southern American English (those of Georgia, Texas, Mississippi) are also more or less similar in the words they contain and the patterns they include.

If we do not exaggerate, in this way, the differences between Indo-European dialects, we find that we can naturally speak of close degrees of meaning-likeness between expressions belonging to the whole family. Such similarities are absent when we move outside the family, and a speaker like Whorf, who is at home with dialects in and out of the family, will be struck by the fact that, for such pairs of languages as English and Nootka (or relevant dialects thereof), expressions can rarely be found that overlap even in primary extension. One can point to a robin, or draw a picture of the bird, and while one will know that a certain predicate of English is applicable to it, one may discover that a corresponding expression of Nootka is not so applicable, or not appropriate to one's current visual stimulus. Cases like this lend great plausibility to the contention of Whorf and others that languages pairs such as English and Nootka are not associated with any common conceptual scheme or scheme of classification.

To make this last contention credible, I have to stress the importance of another linguistic continuity—this time between language and metalanguage. A standard way of avoiding semantic paradoxes is to distinguish, within a natural language, an object language and an unending hierarchy of metalanguages. Though this maneuver is helpful in avoiding the relevant paradoxes, it is clearly artificial and capable of raising other problems, at least for the unwary. I believe that one such problem concerns the notion of a predicate's extension. Philosophers who, like Quine, place great weight on the distinction suppose that, to specify a predicate's reference or extension, one must proceed (or one inevitably does proceed) in a distinct, higher-order language. This supposition transforms the subject of a predicate's reference into a subject involving the relation between two different languages—a subject that leads Quine to his doctrine of semantic (translational and referential) indeterminacy and the view (presumably) that any two languages are mutually translatable.[16] I think it is important not to forget that the predicate "refers to" or "applies to" are English words and that one can specify the reference of a predicate—say what a predicate applies to—without moving outside of what is reasonably called "English."

If one says that the predicate "horses" applies to horses, one is mentioning and using *the very same English predicate*; one is not, except in a significantly artificial sense, referring to one expression and using another that is naturally said to be its translation. When we learn a language, we learn (among other things) to identify expressions belonging to it,[17] and we also learn what (among other things) these expressions apply to. In learning, for example, that crocodiles are animals, we also learn (if English is our language) that "animal" applies to crocodiles and, if our learning is at first had, that "crocodile" applies to some animals. This learning accords with a pattern we can easily generalize:

> If "—" applies (indifferently) to *****s, then *****s are —s; and if "*****" applies to some —s, then some —s are *****s.

This pattern, which is one of many that a fluent speaker of English naturally masters, involves a crucial and special segmentation of one's own language into recurrent parts or words; it is not merely a segmentation that accords with the "analytical hypotheses" that the speaker of some other language might formulate in an attempt to interpret one's language in his (or her) terms.

It seems to me that, if one accepts the fact that every language carries with it a distinctive segmentation and that the extensions of expressions in languages like English can be specified in favored ways within those languages, one should allow that speakers who are masters of different languages and can survey these distinctive segmentations, thus comparing the relevant extensions, can determine in a favored way the extent to which the languages are translatable. Perhaps all languages are mutually translatable in Quine's weak sense of "translatable," but they are not so translatable in the tougher sense I have in mind. It is this tougher sense that concerned Vladimir Nabakov when he produced his highly literal but (as he admitted) unpoetic, ugly, bumpy English version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*—one in which he attempted to replace deliberately archaic (slangy, colloquial, uncommon, "portmanteau" etc.) Russian words with comparably archaic (slangy, and so forth) English counterparts.[18]

From one point of view, the remarks I have been making here are compatible with Quine's thesis of translational (and referential) indeterminacy. Translatability in the tough sense is, one might say, translatability that is relative to special translation manuals, or

favored segmentations and favored extensions; it is not independent of all manuals whatever. There is always, in principle, more than one way of systematically correlating distinguishable segments of individual or community verbal behavior, and translation (or the assignment of segments to segments) is always relative to a chosen system of correlation. But if, in some cases, certain means of correlation are favored in the way I have explained, then certain translation manuals have a favored status; and when we speak, in a nontechnical way, of translations, we have those special manuals in mind. So in a sense translation is not "merely" relative; in the tough sense certain languages aren't (if Whorf is to be believed) really translatable at all: the most one can offer are "crude paraphrases," or translations in a weak, artificial sense.

I think it is fair to say that, if the expressions of two languages are not strongly translatable but only crudely paraphrasable, then those languages cannot involve anything that is reasonably called a common conceptual scheme. I would not conclude from this, however, that if languages are strongly translatable, then they are associated with a common conceptual scheme. I wouldn't draw this conclusion because, contrary to the supposition Davidson makes in discussing the idea of a conceptual scheme, I do not think that languages should be taken to be associated with particular (or single) conceptual schemes at all. As I see it, a conceptual scheme is best understood in relation to a system of beliefs, assertions, or classificatory principles that may, along with other (sometimes incompatible) systems, be expressed in a particular language. Thus, while I can agree that two languages whose expressions cannot be "calibrated" are not associated with any common scheme, I am not prepared to concede that if they can be so calibrated, there is a particular scheme that as languages they both express, share, or involve.

When a conceptual scheme is expressed or embodied in language, the relevant expressions are systematized in a particular way. My claim is that a language (idiolect, dialect) can be systematized in many ways for many different purposes and that, although some of these ways are sufficiently thoroughgoing to involve the construction (in whole or part) of what are reasonably called conceptual schemes, no scheme of this kind is characteristic of a language itself. My view on this matter requires some elaboration.

One purpose for which we may systematize a language or descriptive vocabulary is to classify various objects. If we have singled out

a domain of living things divided into animals and plants, we might adopt various ways of classifying the members of these subclasses. As far as animals are concerned, we might adopt a traditional scheme involving warm-and cold-blooded vertebrates. In adopting such a scheme, we conceive of animals as related in a particular way: so conceived, snakes and turtles are closely related vertebrates—members of the kind, *reptiles*. As it happens, this sort of scheme is out of date in contemporary biology, for animals are now classified partly by reference to their physiology or DNA, and from that point of view turtles are much closer to birds than they are to snakes.[19] A scheme that is outdated is not thereby erroneous or false, however; it merely does not accord with a new classificatory purpose.

A notoriously fundamental classificatory purpose is associated with ontology. Since the beginning of philosophical time, philosophers have been concerned to place the various "things" we speak of into ontological categories, some more fundamental than the rest. From this point of view, a herd of goats or a pair of gloves may be declared less fundamental (or less "real") that the individual goats or gloves in question. In our century a favored strategy in metaphysics is linguistic, and those adopting the strategy are apt to make their point in the "formal mode," saying, for instance, that *expressions* such as "herd" and "pair" are mere *façons de parler*, eliminable in careful, sober speech by expressions referring to individual goats, gloves, and their relations to others. When Russell adopted this strategy, he argued that the only expressions not eliminable in favor of others apply to entities of just two categories, attributes (or "universals") and particulars.[20]

It is important to realize that metaphysical classifications are not prompted merely by worries related to expressions in ordinary use. Historically, they have been prompted by perplexities concerning the nature of all sorts of entities—of numbers, points, particles, fields, temporal intervals, and rational beings—and how such things fit together into a coherent, unitary system. Russell thought that relativity physics required us to conceive of the world as a system of "events" arranged in a four-dimensional manifold, space-time.[21] We ordinarily speak of objects—chairs, for example—as persisting in time, but such "objects" have the fictitious reality, Russell thought, of a pair of gloves: the reality corresponding to our everyday object-word "chair" is a spatio-temporally extended series of chair-events or chair-stages, each such event or stage being a complex reality consisting

(at one level of analysis) of the micro-stages appropriate to micro-objects. Russell's conception of the world—his conceptual framework—was fundamentally different from that of Leibniz, whose ontological views were equally comprehensive. As everyone knows, Leibniz conceived of the world as a system of temporally extended but spatially unextended monads. Like Russell, Leibniz was willing to speak with the vulgar and say that *there are* tables and chairs, even though he was convinced that such entities were merely "well-founded" (but ultimately fictional) "phenomena".[22]

One means of introducing some system into a language is to identify certain expressions as primitive and others as derivative or defined, the idea being that the latter are, in principle, eliminable from the language in favor of the former with no loss in factual content. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries philosophers attempted to found what is in effect this distinction on our alleged built-in mental capacities—on our innate ideas and our ability to combine them into certain sorts of compounds (rationalists), or on our ability to generate primitive ideas from experience and construct compounds from them (empiricists). This means of supporting the distinction is no longer fashionable, but one still hears it argued (as Strawson did) that certain "concepts" are reasonably considered primitive on the ground, roughly, that they are "logical ingredients" in other concepts but not vice-versa.[23] Those who, like most philosophers today, are doubtful about ostensive definitions and analyticity would have to base such a distinction on a very different ground—perhaps on the belief that the referents of certain terms (ordinary physical objects, events, or perhaps sense data) actually belong to the world and that other terms can be understood as collectively providing convenient but theoretically dispensable means of dealing with those genuinely existent entities. The crucial point implied by this aproach is that if a language (idiolect or dialect) is understood as, at bottom, a mere system of verbal behavior—or as a collection of expressions ("words") used in accordance with a particular grammar—then a language involves no distinction between primitive and derivative (or "defined") expressions. Such a distinction may, at best, be imposed on a language by this or that philosopher (or thinker) for this or that purpose; it is not intrinsic to a language itself. I accept this view—and its (virtual) consequence that a particular conceptual scheme is not intrinsic to a language either.

For reasons none too clear to me, philosophers like Davidson have

little to say about systematizing a language or dialect in the ways I have mentioned. Davidson, in particular, deals with ontological questions by reference to a semantical theory, one taking the form of a truth-theory for a language (or, perhaps, idiolect). In line with this, he insists that, to account for various implications between sentences of English, one must construct an appropriate semantical theory. According to the theory he favors, sentences such as "Mary smiled yesterday" are true just in case certain "events" actually existed (or occurred). His idea is not that such things (and, no doubt, things like numbers, points, times, classes, and fields of force) must be allowed to exist in a manner of speaking; his idea is that, if we accept the relevant sentences as true, we must acknowledge the existence of such things *tout court*.

Quite apart from any doubts I may have about Davidson's treatment of various sorts of English sentences,[24] his "method of truth" in metaphysics seems simply to bypass the fundamental issues in the subject, and do so in an unilluminating way. (The same is true, I hasten to add, of other attempts to resolve metaphysical issues by a straightforward application of truth-conditional or model-theoretic semantics.) If one is worried about the "reality" of this or that sort of entity—of spatial points, temporal instants, causal connections, attributes, sets, possible worlds, electromagnetic fields, quanta, and the like—any theory that assigns truth-conditions to sentences in a systematic way and does not attempt to deal with the distinctive features of these supposed entitites will be virtually useless for one's metaphysical purposes. Thus, while there may be contexts in which it is illuminating to say "There are sets" is true (in L) if and only if there are sets, the context I have described is not one of them.

As I mentioned earlier, Russell showed us how to reconstruct much of our language so that it involves an ontology of events, one in which space, time, and persisting things (or continuants) are mere logical constructions. Others have tried to show how everyday speech, at least, can be systematized so that it involves an ontology of continuants, one is which events, space, time, and causation (or causal sequences) are mere constructions.[25] Each such system of language is reasonably said to provide, or perhaps embody, a conceptual scheme, and each is alternative to the other. Being thus alternative does not require the schemes to be associated with different languages—let alone with languages that are mutually untranslatable in some strong sense. Alternativeness is a matter of systematic dif-

ference in the relevant languages—of different descriptive apparatus. I have argued elsewhere that this sort of difference does not always amount to an incompatibility because the systems I have just described could conceivably (but in fact need not) apply to the same world.[26] On the other hand, I can think of no reason to believe that all pairs of schemes should have this character.

What I have been saying thus far supports, directly or indirectly, the following contention: There is nothing philosophically objectionable in the very idea of a conceptual scheme; the idea can be rendered perfectly reasonable along the lines I have indicated. Having suported this contention, I now turn to the other principal question on my agenda: Are Putnam and others right in thinking that the existence of different (or alternative) conceptual schemes undermines the traditional view that there is really just one world, which may be described in different ways?

Any discussion of what there "really" is should be clear about the idea of reality, or what is real. To achieve this clarity it is useful to recall that the term "real" (or *realis*, its Latin synonym) was invented as a philosophical term in the thirteenth century to apply to things whose existence is independent of anyone's belief about (or mental attitude to) them. The intended contrast to *real thing* was *imaginary thing* or *fiction*. Given this understanding of the world "real," the question to ask in relation to a plausible form of "metaphysical" realism is whether the objects to which a given concept is applicable would have existed if that concept had not been invented. This is the important question to ask because multiple-worlders (as they may be called) support their doctrine by insisting that the objects (and thus the world) of a conceptual scheme is partly "constructed" by that scheme, so that different schemes "construct" different worlds. Their general idea is that any world not thus "constructed" would be an unknowable thing-in-itself, not the knowable reality that sober thinkers investigate and describe.[27]

To answer the question that is crucial here, it is helpful to consider a specific example. As I explained earlier, the concept of a reptile is a human invention that is no longer employed (or is at least currently criticized) by zoologists. A specific question to ask, then, is whether there would be reptiles if the concept of a reptile had never been invented.

As it happens, there is a reptile—a garter snake—in my woodpile right now. Is it true (or must we say) that that particular snake would

not have existed if the concept of reptile had never been invented? The question requires us to evaluate the truth of a counterfactual conditional—the sort of assertion that is notoriously difficult to answer in the abstract. Nevertheless, an affirmative answer seems reasonable in this case. If the concept had not been invented, the snake would not then be classifiable as a reptile, but it would still be a snake (and classifiable as such), and it would still satisfy the crucial description "cold-blooded vertebrate." It is not as if the animal would in any way be changed by the absence of a concept. "What's in a name? —that which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet."

If we look at a wall covered with wallpaper having a highly complex design, we may discern various patterns in it—just as we can often discern the shapes of human faces in clouds or vegetation. Also, an arrangement of shapes can be described to us, and we can then *see* whether the wall (or regions in it) satisfy the description or not. As a general matter, our surroundings can always be described in different ways, but they impose limits on the truth of possible descriptions because not every description will fit them. A wall that can be truly described in different ways is *really* such that the different descriptions are applicable to it.

In "The Very Idea of A Conceptual Scheme" Davidson criticized two metaphors that are often used to characterize conceptual schemes. According to one, a conceptual scheme is supposed to "organize" (systematize, divide up) something; according to the other, a conceptual scheme "fits" something (the world, objects, experience). I believe that the remarks I have just made show that both metaphors *may* actually be all right. A conceptual scheme can organize a world by providing a system of predicates that apply to and thereby classify (or systematically interrelate) objects discernible in it; it may fit a world in the sense that the relevant predicates are satisfied (perhaps to an adequate degree) by the objects thus discernible. In taking objects as the correlates of fitting, I betray my conviction that facts are really fictions (not real things). And in contrast to Davidson, I believe that real things do make statements true.[28] The statement "My skin is warm" is made true by *my warm skin*; if I had cold skin, the statement would have been false.

The idea that we "construct" our reality has a Kantian ring, and many-worlders often write as if Kant proved it true, or rendered it credible. But Kant is (to put it mildly) easy to misunderstand, and his achievement is easy to misdescribe. However successful he may

have been in his first critique, he didn't come close to showing that the world we experience—the world that exists in space and time—is actually put together by our transcendental selves, as if by ghostly fingers. The only way a mind (transcendental or not) can organize a world is by *representing* in it an organized way. What we construct is a world picture—or, better, a world story, for the picture consists of judgments, and these, when asserted, yield stories rather than pictures or objects in a world.

My principal conclusions in this paper are these. If the notion of a conceptual scheme is understood along the lines I have indicated, then there is nothing philosophically objectionable in the idea that different conceptual schemes are possible. If, in addition, different schemes may be used to distinguish different objects in the world and classify what they distinguish in different ways, these different schemes may yet apply to the very same world. This world, though describable in radically different ways, is not thereby indeterminate, ineffable, inscrutable, noumental, or ready-made. My way of describing conceptual schemes has the consequence, perhaps, that Russell and Leibniz had (at least officially) different conceptual schemes, though they could understand each other's language. But it is reasonable for all that.[29]

Notes

1. See Davidson (1974).
2. *Ibid* and also Davidson (1969).
3. See Putnam (1981), Goodman (1978), and Rorty (1972).
4. See Davidson (1984, p. 184).
5. See W.V.O. Quine (1960, ch. 2) and Quine (1969). For the point of my qualification in the text about languages or dialects of comparable richness, see footnote 12 below.
6. My second premiss here, "more than one such manual always exists," might be formulated more cautiously as "more than one such manual (potentially) exists if any manual exists." On this, see footnote 16 below. My interpretation of Quine's argument for transitional indeterminacy is expounded and defended in Aune (1975).
7. Davidson (1984, pp. 194f). Here Davidson has in mind Tarski's "convention T," according to which (in Davidson's words) "a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence *s* of L, a theorem of the form '*s* is true if and only if *p*', where '*s*' is replaced by a description of *s* and '*p*' by *s* itself if L is English, and by a translation of *s* into English if L is not English."

8. Davidson's argument for the key principle of his second case presupposes his theory of "interpretation," which he does not state in the clearest possible terms. In Aune (1985, pp. 147-153) I interpret his theory as involving an "extended principle of charity," according to which a reasonable interpretation of another's speech must presume that the other's beliefs do not differ radically from one's own. If a Davidsonian "interpretation" is not a materially stronger relation that a Quinean "translation," then the principle of charity is perhaps defensible as a means of coping with another's behavior. In other respects it is highly dubious. Consider the beliefs of someone who has the sort of basic education American colleges and universities now wish their graduates to possess. These beliefs concern history, sociology, philosophy, literature, architecture, painting and sculpture, music, psychology or cognitive science, anthropology, botany, zoology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, astronomy, and the like. Must every "native speaker" be presumed to possess all these beliefs? Or must only some beliefs be shared? If so, which ones? Naively commonsense ones? But are these beliefs the only ones to consider in connection with a reasonable doctrine of conceptual relativism? I think not—as my remarks to follow indicate.
9. See my remarks on the metaphysics of truth in Aune (1985, 157ff and *passim*).
10. Whorf (1956).
11. Davidson (1984, p. 184).
12. I doubt if we would allow that every English sentence is crudely paraphrasable in the terms of every language. This is patently true if languages include the mini-languages invented by children or the language "games" discussed by Wittgenstein (1959, Part I), but it is also pretty obvious if one considers the large technical vocabulary of English (for chemisty, biology, etc.) and the lack of such in the languages of, say, hunter-gatherer societies.
13. Whorf (1956, p. 242)
14. *Ibid.*
15. Goodman (1972).
16. I say "presumably" here because I am merely confident, and not certain, that Quine will agree that any two languages (of comparable richness, at least) are mutually translatable in his sense. I am wholly confident that he will agree that if a language is translatable into another language, it is so in more than one way—that is, more than one translation manual relating the two languages will then exist. See my discussion in Aune (1975).
17. See Sapir (1921, p. 34).
18. See Nabakov's amusing and instructive remarks in Nabakov (1968).
19. See Gribben and Cherfas (1983, p. 93).

20. See my discussion of Russell's program in Aune (1985, ch. 2).
21. Russell (1948, pp. 305-309) and Russell (1927).
22. See the discussion in Mates (1986, ch. 2).
23. Strawson (1959, p. 102).
24. See my critical remarks in Aune (1985, pp. 131-135 and 155ff).
25. I have tried to show this in Aune (1985, ch. 6).
26. See Putnam (1981), Ch. 3, esp. pp. 72ff.
27. See Aune (1985), pp. 125ff.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 157ff.
29. For helpful discussion on this paper, I thank Gareth Matthews, Murray Kiteley, Michael Jubien and Thomas Tymoczko.

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