

Quine and Davidson

Philosophy 135

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1. Quine, *The Pursuit of Truth* (pp. 37–8): “I hold. . . that the behaviorist approach is mandatory. In psychology one may or may not be a behaviorist, but in linguistics one has no choice. Each of us learns his language by observing other people’s verbal behavior and having his own faltering verbal behavior observed and reinforced or corrected by others. We depend strictly on overt behavior in observable situations. As long as our command of our language fits all external checkpoints, where our utterance or our reaction to someone’s utterance can be appraised in the light of some shared situation, so long all is well. Our mental life between checkpoints is indifferent to our rating as a master of the language. There is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behavior in observable circumstances.”
2. Davidson, “The Inscrutability of Reference,” from *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. 235: “The semantic features of language are public features. What no one can, in the nature of the case, figure out from the totality of the relevant evidence cannot be part of the meaning.”
3. Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 219: “In the strictest scientific spirit we can report all the behavior, verbal and otherwise, that may underlie our imputations of propositional attitudes, and we may go on to speculate as we please upon the causes and effects of this behavior; but so long as we do not switch muses, the essentially dramatic idiom of propositional attitudes will find no place.”
4. Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 221: “Brentano’s thesis of the irreducibility of intentional idioms [to scientific terms] is of a piece with the thesis of indeterminacy of translation. One may accept the Brentano thesis either as showing the indispensability of intentional idioms and the importance of an autonomous science of intention, or as showing the baselessness of intentional idioms and the emptiness of a science of intention. My attitude, unlike Brentano’s, is the second.”
5. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. 239: “. . . an empirical theory of a person’s language does not stand alone: it is part of a more general theory that includes a theory of his beliefs, desires, intentions, and perhaps more.”
6. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. xvii: “[The Principle of Charity] counsels us quite generally to prefer theories of interpretation that minimize disagreement. So I tended to put the matter in the early essays, wanting to stress the inevitability of the appeal to charity. But minimizing disagreement, or maximizing agreement, is a confused ideal. The aim of interpretation is not agreement but understanding. My point has always been that understanding can be secured only by interpreting in a way that makes for the right sort of agreement. The ‘right sort’, however, is no easier to specify than to say what constitutes a good reason for holding a particular belief.” (xvii)
7. Davidson, “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” p. 154: “. . . concepts like those of meaning and belief are, in a fundamental way, not reducible to physical, neurological, or even behaviouristic concepts. This irreducibility is not due, however, to the indeterminacy of meaning or translation, for if I am right, indeterminacy is important only for calling attention to how the interpretation of speech must

go hand in hand with the interpretation of action generally, and so with the attribution of desires and beliefs. It is rather the methods we must invoke in constructing theories of belief and meaning that ensures the irreducibility of the concepts essential to those theories. Each interpretation and attribution of attitude is a move within a holistic theory, a theory necessarily governed by a concern for consistency and general coherence with the truth, and it is this that sets these theories forever apart from those that describe mindless objects, or describe objects as mindless.”