

Glüer, Kathrin. *Donald Davidson: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. vii + 313 pp. Cloth \$99.00 , Paper, \$24.95, Ebook, \$15.00—This is an excellent guide to Donald Davidson's important contributions to many aspects of philosophy, including the theory of action, linguistic meaning, the relation between mind and body, rationality, empiricism, etc. It is chock full of interesting points.

In the first, introductory chapter, Glüer argues convincingly for the centrality of *radical interpretation* in Davidson's philosophy. For Davidson, this sort of interpretation applies only to rational animals and only creatures with language can be rational in the relevant respect. And the principles of such interpretation require that "the vast majority of background beliefs is bound to be true" (p. 5). Radical interpretation is based on a "principle of charity." General skepticism about other minds or the external world is ruled out. Any sort of naturalistic reduction of the mental to the physical is ruled out as well.

Chapter 2 discusses Davidson's account of radical interpretation. He took such interpretation to be possible only for a creature with a language that has a compositional truth-conditional semantics that assigns truth conditions to sentences in relation to various contexts in which they are or might be used. Davidson adapts Tarski's method for defining truth in a formal language by treating truth as a primitive notion in order to treat the truth conditions assigned to sentences as their meanings. The interpretive T-sentences must be law-like statements derived via a "canonical proof." Furthermore, the assignments of truth conditions to statements is an empirical matter. Interpreters must consider whether the speaker is expressing a belief and, if so, what belief is being

expressed. This requires that interpreters appeal to a principle of charity in their interpretations of particular speakers. Chapter 2 continues by discussing three kinds of indeterminacy: indeterminacy of truth, indeterminacy of logical form, and indeterminacy of reference and concludes with an account of Davidson's rejection of linguistic conventions.

Chapter 3 offers an extensive discussion of Davidson's understanding of the appeal to charity in interpretation of others. At least two kinds of charity are relevant, coherence and correspondence. To the greatest extent possible a person's views should be interpreted as *cohering* with each other as well as *corresponding* with what is the case. These aspects of charity imply that a person should be interpreted as rational to the greatest extent possible. For Davidson the objects of beliefs are often their causes. And in his later writings speaks about an "essential triangle" involving a teacher, a student, and an object in the world. The student acquires a way to refer to the object, because the teacher has referred to the object in that way. Furthermore, the most charitable T-theory is the correct T-theory. Charity determines linguistic meaning, which is essentially public. The chapter ends with an argument that in Davidson's view we can know a priori that meaning is determined by charity.

Chapter 4 discusses Davidson's theory of action, starting with his early paper, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes." It describes Davidson's view that explanations in terms of reasons are causal and Davidson's important and very influential discussion of the logical form of action sentences. It discusses Davidson's shifting ideas about what events are. Davidson holds that there are no strict psychological laws. But the same is

true of natural sciences like geology, biology, and meteorology. A related point is that, according to Davidson, we cannot give a *definition* of intentional action, because of possible deviant causal chains.

The chapter ends with a discussion of Davidson's conception of practical reasoning, which Davidson argues cannot be reconstructed by means of the practical syllogism. His revised model allows for conflicting reasons, pure intentions that an agent fails to act on, and weakness of will.

Chapter 5 says more about language, mind, and world. Davidson emphatically rejects the sort of conceptual relativism found for example in Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In Davidson's view, there are no epistemic intermediaries between ordinary material objects and perceptual beliefs about them. Perceptual beliefs are epistemically basic. Reasons are best thought of as the contents of their subjects' mental states. Glüer goes on to discuss John McDowell's objection that experience is a kind of propositional attitude. The chapter concludes with a useful account of Davidson's triangulation argument(s) for the claim that "the content of perceptual belief is determined by a triangle formed by two sentient creatures and an object (or event) in the world" (p. 235).

Chapter 6 discusses Davidson's Anomalous Monism, his conception of the relation between the mental and the physical.

A final appendix describes a T-theory for a fragment of English.

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