

The Principle of Charity

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ABSTRACT: The recent publication of a third anthology of Donald Davidson's articles, and anticipated publication of two more, encourages a consideration of themes binding together Davidson's lifetime of research. One such theme is the principle of charity (PC). In light of the mileage Davidson gets out of PC, I propose a careful examination of PC itself. In Part 1, I consider some ways in which Davidson articulates PC. In Part 2, I show that the articulation that Davidson requires in his work on epistemology is untenable given what Davidson says in his work on semantics. I conclude that Davidson can use PC only in his work on semantics or not at all.

RÉSUMÉ : La parution récente du troisième recueil d'articles de Donald Davidson, lequel devrait être suivi de deux autres, incite à examiner les thèmes qui traversent tous ses travaux. Parmi ces thèmes se trouve le principe de charité (PC). Considérant tout le parti que Davidson a tiré du PC, je me propose d'en faire un examen attentif. Dans la première partie, j'examine diverses formulations du PC par Davidson. Dans la seconde partie, je montre que la formulation qu'exigent ses travaux d'épistémologie est intenable étant donné ce qu'il en dit dans ses travaux de sémantique. De là, je conclus que Davidson ne peut se servir du PC que dans ses travaux de sémantique ou pas du tout.

The recent publication of a third anthology of Donald Davidson's articles, and anticipated publication of two more,¹ encourages a consideration of themes binding together Davidson's lifetime of research. One such theme is the principle of charity (PC). In light of the mileage Davidson gets out of PC, I propose a careful examination of PC itself. Hence, though Ramberg is right that "precise articulation of the principle of charity turns out to be an extremely tricky task" (1989, p. 70),² in Part 1 of this article I con-

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sider some ways in which Davidson does articulate PC. In Part 2 I show that the articulation that Davidson requires in his work on epistemology is untenable given what Davidson says in his work on semantics.

1.

Davidson (1984a) introduces PC as a methodological principle in semantics. According to Davidson, a radical interpreter needs to use PC to construct a Tarski-style theory of truth for an alien's language. Such a theory, Davidson claims, amounts to a theory of meaning for that language. According to Davidson, an alien means by a particular utterance whatever such a theory entails that she would mean by it, and believes whatever is necessary that she be taken to believe in order to construct such a theory of meaning in the first place.³

My concern is not whether Davidson is right, but how, in light of its use specifically as a methodological principle in semantics, Davidson articulates PC. Relative to that use, Davidson offers three, sometimes overlapping, articulations of PC. First, Davidson says that to construct a theory of meaning for an alien's language, an interpreter *maximizes agreement* between the alien and herself as far as possible:

Charity in interpreting the words and thoughts of others is unavoidable in another direction as well: just as we must *maximize agreement*, or risk not making sense of what the alien is talking about, so we must maximize the self-consistency we attribute to him, on pain of not understanding *him*. (1984a, p. 27; my emphasis on "maximize agreement")⁴

We want a theory that satisfies the formal constraints on a theory of truth, and that *maximizes agreement*, in the sense of making [aliens] right, as far as we can tell, as often as possible. (1984b, p. 136; my emphasis)

Now, according to Davidson (1984a, 1984b), an interpreter maximizes agreement on sentences held true, and sentences held true are beliefs. So Davidson first claims that PC advises an interpreter to maximize agreement on beliefs shared by the alien and herself. But what does "maximize agreement" mean? In the latter quotation, Davidson explicates it as an interpreter's taking an alien to be right by the interpreter's lights as often as possible.

This explication itself seems to be a second articulation of PC, variations of which Davidson offers elsewhere:

[Providing a theory of meaning] is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that *make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view on what is right*. (1984b, p. 137; my emphasis)

The general policy, however, is to *choose truth conditions that do as well as possible in making speakers hold sentences true when (according to the theory and theory builder's view on the facts) those sentences are true.* (1984c, p. 150; my emphasis)

We get a first approximation of a finished theory by assigning to sentences of a speaker *conditions of truth that actually obtain (in our own opinion)* just when the speaker holds those sentences true. The guiding policy is to do this *as far as possible.* (1984d, p. 196; my emphasis)

For Davidson, since a sentence held true is a belief, his second articulation of PC is that an interpreter *as far as possible takes an alien to have beliefs true by her interpreter's lights.*

Davidson sometimes uses these first two articulations together. But twice he modifies the first from “maximize” to “optimize”:

The methodological advice to interpret in a way that *optimizes agreement* should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence. . . . If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs *largely consistent and true by our own standards*, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything. (1984b, p. 137; my emphasis)

The basic methodological precept is, therefore, that a good theory of interpretation maximizes agreement. Or, given that sentences are infinite in number . . . a better word might be *optimize.* (1984e, p. 169)

These seem to express a third articulation of PC: an interpreter *optimizes agreement* between the alien and herself.

Now why does Davidson switch from “maximize” to “optimize”? Though Davidson might have more than one reason, the latter quotation makes clear that his *chief* reason involves his claim that an alien has an infinite number of beliefs and that one cannot “maximize” an infinite number of anything.⁵

Why does Davidson claim that an alien has an infinite number of beliefs? Though my concern is not whether Davidson is right, but rather how his claiming this relates to his articulating PC, let me nonetheless present Davidson's reason for claiming this. Davidson does so, because it follows from the way in which he uses Tarski's semantic theory of truth to generate a theory of meaning. Davidson adopts Tarski's method of recursively generating an infinite number of T-sentences, each stating that one of an infinite number of recursively generated object-language sentences is true if, and only if, one of an infinite number of recursively generated metalanguage sentences is true. And, for Davidson, each object-language

sentence is a sentence that an alien, and each metalanguage sentence a sentence that an interpreter, *holds* true, respectively. Thus Davidson writes: "The aim of theory will be an *infinite* number of sentences alike in truth," immediately continuing: "What the [interpreter] must do is find out, however he can, what sentences the alien *holds* true in his own tongue" (1984a, p. 27; my emphasis). Now, for Davidson, since a sentence held true just is a belief, an alien therefore has an infinite number of beliefs.

One might object that on Davidson's view an interpreter need not attribute to an alien an infinite number of beliefs. Instead, she can take the alien to speak a language with an infinite number of sentences. Yet, for Davidson, a language just is the set of sentences (expressed homophonically) that an alien holds true. And, for Davidson, these sentences held true are determined by an interpreter when constructing a theory of meaning. I take this to be one way of understanding Davidson's remark: "I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with" (1986, pp. 445-46), for Davidson's point seems to be that it is a mistake to understand a language as something existing independently of particular acts of interpretation, and so particular theories of meaning. Now since such a theory contains an infinite number of T-sentences, correlating an infinite number of object-language sentences, which the alien holds true, with an infinite number of metalanguage sentences, an alien holds an infinite number of sentences true. And so, for Davidson, the alien has an infinite number of beliefs.

One might object to an alien's having an *infinite* number of beliefs on its own terms. Again, my concern is not whether Davidson is correct. Nonetheless, let me suggest what Davidson has in mind. According to Davidson, a belief is identified only against the background of a "system" (1984e, p. 157) or "dense pattern" (1984f, p. 200) of beliefs. If an interpreter takes an alien to believe, e.g., that it is raining, the interpreter might also take the alien to believe that rain falls, that rain falls from the sky, that rain falls from the sky to the ground, that rain falls from the sky to the ground today, and that the ground is below the sky. Further there is in principle no reason why an interpreter need stop. In fact, Davidson claims that the only alternative to identifying a belief against such a background of beliefs is to identify it as expressing an analytic truth,⁶ but Davidson rejects that there are such truths.

Regarding one's not being able to "maximize" an infinite number of anything, Davidson (1984b, p. 137; 1984e, p. 169) seems to understand "maximize agreement" as something like taking the alien and interpreter to agree on *most* beliefs. "Optimize agreement" might then mean something like taking the alien and interpreter to agree on *as many* beliefs as possible. Only this explains why Davidson thinks that maximizing an infi-

nite number of things is unintelligible, and why, for Davidson (1984b, p. 137; 1984e, p. 169), “optimize” is preferable to “maximize”: whereas sense can be made of agreeing on *as many* of an infinite number of beliefs *as possible*, no sense can be made of agreeing on *most* of an infinite number of beliefs. For *any* number of beliefs less than the total would be *infinitely* less than the total; “most” cannot quantify over an infinite number of anything.⁷

Yet, recall Davidson (1984b, p. 136) explicating “maximize agreement” as taking an alien as often as possible to be right by the interpreter’s lights. And this *is* consistent with there being an infinite number of beliefs. In fact, Davidson there seems to understand “maximize agreement” *in the same way as* he elsewhere (1984b, p. 137; 1984e, p. 169) understands “optimize agreement.” Nonetheless, as explained below, this ambiguity does not threaten my understanding him.

Now, Davidson attempts to use PC, as it functions semantically, to draw two conclusions in epistemology: that scheme-content dualism (1984d) and scepticism (1984f; 2001b) are both untenable.⁸

Relative to these uses, Davidson offers two different, conflicting articulations of PC. These articulations still concern PC as it functions semantically, but, unlike the others, are meant to allow Davidson to reach his epistemic conclusions.

The first new articulation, the fourth *in toto*, amounts to the claim that to construct a theory of meaning, an interpreter *takes most of an alien’s beliefs to be true by her interpreter’s lights*:

Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must *count them right in most matters*. (1984d, p. 197; my emphasis)

But of course it cannot be assumed that speakers never have false beliefs. . . . We can, however, take it as a given that *most* beliefs are correct. . . . A theory of interpretation cannot be correct that makes a man assent to very many false sentences: it must generally be the case that a sentence is true when a speaker holds it to be. (1984e, p. 169)

So, now Davidson explicitly talks of “most” of an infinite number of beliefs. And this fourth articulation explicates the sense of the first articulation not explicated by the second: “maximizing agreement” can mean either, as *per* the second articulation, taking an alien and interpreter to share as many beliefs as possible, or, as *per* the fourth, taking most of an alien’s beliefs to be true by her interpreter’s lights.

Davidson needs to articulate PC in the latter way to reach his epistemic conclusions. For Davidson (1984d) purports to establish his first epistemic conclusion, the untenability of scheme-content dualism, by establishing the impossibility of two kinds of failures of translatability, viz., “complete,

and partial, failures of translatability. There would be complete failure if no significant range of [true] sentences in one language could be translated into the other; there would be partial failure if some significant range could be translated and some range could not" (1984d, p. 185).⁹ If partial failure of translatability is impossible, then *no* significant range of true sentences in one language fails to be translatable into another language. Though Davidson is not explicit on what no significant range of such sentences entails, he does write in the same article, as quoted above, that "we must count [our interlocutors] right in *most* matters." Thus, whatever else it entails, no significant range of such sentences entails that *most* sentences held true in one language are translatable into another. So, for Davidson to establish the untenability of scheme-content dualism, he must establish that most sentences held true in one language *need* to be translatable into another. And since Davidson does so by relying on his account of radical interpretation, most sentences held true in one language need to be translatable into the radical interpreter's language.

Davidson's second epistemic conclusion, that scepticism is untenable, also requires talk of "most" beliefs. Davidson's argument against scepticism is complicated; it involves arguing from PC's specifying truth by an interpreter's lights, plus the possibility of an "omniscient interpreter,"¹⁰ to reach the following conclusions:

But now it is plain why *massive error* about the world is simply unintelligible. (1984f, p. 201; my emphasis)

Once we agree to the general method of interpretation I have sketched, it becomes impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be *mostly wrong* about how things are. (2001b, p. 151; my emphasis)

From the rest of Davidson's argument, it becomes clear that his conclusion is not merely that *massive error* is unintelligible and that it is impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be *mostly wrong* about how things are. His conclusion is that only *massive truth* is intelligible, and that it is impossible to hold that anyone could not be *mostly right* about how things are. For ruling out the possibility of massive error or being mostly wrong still allows one to be right and wrong the same amount of time, and such a state of affairs does not establish the untenability of scepticism. Regardless, as with the case of "no significant range," Davidson is not explicit on what "massive error" or "massive truth" and "mostly wrong" or "mostly right" entail. Nonetheless, his uses of them suggest that, whatever else they entail, they entail that *most* beliefs are erroneous or true, and wrong or right, respectively. For otherwise Davidson would not be able to establish the untenability of scepticism. And so his conclusions amount to the claim that it is necessary that *most* beliefs are true. Recall

that Davidson's argument for this involves his relying on PC's specifying truth by an interpreter's lights. But then to argue that scepticism is untenable, Davidson needs to articulate PC as an interpreter's taking most of an alien's beliefs to be true by her interpreter's lights.

But how *can* Davidson talk about "most" beliefs? For Davidson is right that no sense can be made of most of an infinite number of anything, and, recall, for him, an alien has an infinite number of beliefs. In fact, recall, this worry pushes Davidson to prefer talk of "optimizing" to "maximizing" the number of true beliefs in the first place.

Davidson, cognizant of problems concerning "maximizing," is also cognizant of problems concerning "most," for Davidson tries to explicate, with a fifth articulation of PC, what he means by "most beliefs." Writing of a coherence theory of truth, Davidson explains: "All that a coherence theory can maintain is that *most of the beliefs* in a coherent total set of beliefs *are true*" (2001b, p. 138). But Davidson immediately qualifies this:

This way of stating the position can at best be taken as a hint, since there is no useful way to count beliefs, and so no clear meaning to the idea that most of a person's beliefs are true. A somewhat better way to put the point is to say there is a *presumption in favor of the truth* of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief. (ibid., pp. 138-39; my emphasis)

Thus, Davidson here claims, there is a presumption in favour of the truth of a belief that coheres with a significant mass of belief.

This quotation is not an expression of PC *per se* but an epistemic consequence of PC that Davidson uses as an intermediary step in arguing from PC, and his views on semantics generally, against scepticism. For PC as a methodological principle in semantics does not *per se* guarantee that most beliefs are true *simpliciter*, even if understood as there being a presumption that a belief appropriately cohering is true. It guarantees only that most beliefs are true by an interpreter's lights. In other words, there is more to Davidson's argument, from which this most recent excerpt is taken, than PC.¹¹ Nonetheless, keeping this in mind, I understand the quotation as suggesting a fifth articulation of PC itself: *there is a presumption in the favour of an alien's beliefs being true by an interpreter's lights.*

2.

Thus Davidson offers five, sometimes overlapping, articulations of PC:

- (i) an interpreter maximizes agreement on beliefs between her alien and herself as far as possible;
- (ii) an interpreter as far as possible takes an alien to have beliefs true by her interpreter's lights;

- (iii) an interpreter optimizes agreement between the alien and herself (= an interpreter takes an alien and herself to agree on as many beliefs as possible);
- (iv) an interpreter takes most of an alien's beliefs to be true by her interpreter's lights; and
- (v) there is a presumption in the favour of an alien's beliefs being true by an interpreter's lights.

Which of these is best? For Davidson, since (i) is ambiguous, explicable in the sense of either (ii) or (iv), let me consider only (ii)-(v).

Articulations (ii), (iii), and (v) are all too weak to reach either of Davidson's epistemic conclusions. Consider (ii). If an interpreter *as far as possible* takes an alien to have beliefs true by her interpreter's lights, then an alien might have *no* belief true by her interpreter's lights.¹² Hence, *most* of the alien's beliefs *need* not be true by her interpreter's lights. But then both of Davidson's epistemic conclusions are blocked. First, translation is truth-preserving. So if most of an alien's beliefs, and so sentences held true in her language, need not be true by her *interpreter's* lights, then most sentences held true in her language need not be translatable *into* her interpreter's language. But then Davidson's argument against scheme-content dualism fails. Second, Davidson's argument against scepticism purports to show that most of an alien's beliefs need to be true, *by* showing (*inter alia*) that most need to be true by her interpreter's lights. And so Davidson's argument against scepticism fails.

Hence, were Davidson to articulate PC as (ii), then he would fail to establish that either scheme-content dualism or scepticism is untenable. Further, the point generalizes to (iii) and (v), for each articulation is also consistent with an alien's having no belief true by her interpreter's lights. And so, were Davidson to articulate PC as either of these, then he would likewise fail.

That leaves only (iv). Davidson's epistemic conclusions, recall, require something at least as strong. Hence, solving backward from these conclusions to their premises, (iv) seems the best articulation of PC for Davidson.

Nonetheless, (iv) involves making sense of "most" of an infinite number of beliefs, which Davidson himself claims impossible. There are nevertheless at least six ways in which Davidson might be able to do so after all. First, he might use "most beliefs" figuratively. In fact, this seems Davidson's strategy. But the only way in which using "most beliefs" figuratively can help is if it allows Davidson to mean *both* something like a presumption in favour of a certain kind of (viz., true) beliefs *and* most beliefs. For only something like the former can, by Davidson's own lights, avoid unintelligibility, while only something like that latter can, as I have shown,

allow Davidson to use PC to argue for his epistemic conclusions. But then this “figurative” use commits Davidson to both ambiguity (involving two different senses of “most belief”) and unintelligibility (involving most of an infinite number of something). So, this first way in which Davidson might make sense of “most beliefs” leaves him in a worse position than before.

Second, Davidson might simply observe that an interpreter takes such “ordinary” beliefs as that it is raining, but not necessarily such “extraordinary” beliefs as that euthanasia is permissible, to be true by her lights. And Davidson might argue that, whatever difficulty there is in regimenting the claim that there are “many more” ordinary than extraordinary beliefs, there is no disputing that in some sense this claim is true. But then it is a plain fact that in some sense an interpreter does take most of an alien’s beliefs to be true by her lights.

The problem with this response, besides its leaving the sense of “in some sense” opaque, is that on Davidson’s view it is *not* a plain fact that in *any* sense there are “many more” ordinary than extraordinary beliefs. Above, I showed that, for Davidson, if an interpreter takes an alien to believe that it is raining, then she might also take the alien to believe that rain falls, that rain falls from the sky, that rain falls from the sky to the ground, etc. Here I suggest that, for Davidson, if an interpreter takes an alien to believe that euthanasia is permissible, then she might also take the alien to believe that “euthanasia” would describe the act done to *a, b, c*, etc., but not to *p, q, r*, etc.; that euthanasia would be permissible in case one because of *a, b, c*, etc., but not because of *p, q, r*, etc., in case two because of *a, b, c*, etc., but not because of *p, q, r*, etc., in case three because of *a, b, c*, etc., but not because of *p, q, r*, etc., etc.; that euthanasia is frowned upon by those believing *a, b, c*, etc., but not those believing *p, q, r*, etc.; etc. And all these might be beliefs that the interpreter would herself hold false. But then it is not a plain fact that an interpreter would take an alien to believe many more ordinary than extraordinary beliefs, so this would not be a way of Davidson’s explaining how an interpreter could take *most* of an alien’s beliefs to be true by her interpreter’s lights.

Third, Davidson might argue that the number of beliefs that any alien has is finite. Yet, recall, this contradicts a central tenet of Davidson’s adopting a Tarski-style theory of truth as a theory of meaning. Further, also recall, Davidson seems to claim that the only alternative to identifying a belief against what is in principle an infinite number of other beliefs is identifying it as expressing an analytic truth—an alternative that Davidson rejects.

Fourth, Davidson might argue that, though in principle the number of beliefs that any alien has is infinite, in practice an interpreter takes an alien to have only a finite number of beliefs. And of these it does make sense to say that most are true by her interpreter’s lights. Yet, according to Davidson, recall, an alien means by a particular utterance whatever a theory of

meaning for her language *entails* that she would mean by it, and believes whatever is necessary that she be taken to believe in order to *construct* such a theory of meaning in the first place. Now a theory of meaning, even in practice, entails an infinite number of T-sentences, each particular T-sentence *entailing* what an alien would mean by a particular utterance. And, to *construct* an infinite number of T-sentences, and so a theory of meaning, even in practice, it is necessary to take an alien to have an infinite number of beliefs. So, for Davidson, even in practice, an interpreter takes an alien to have an infinite number of beliefs.

Fifth, Davidson might argue that, even though the total set of beliefs is infinite, because he (1970) claims that beliefs are mental states token-identical with brain states, beliefs must occupy physical space in brains. And, since brains have only finite space, there can be only a finite number of beliefs “in” any one of them. Though the difference between beliefs “in” and *not* “in” the brain would need explanation, there would be no problem with “most” applied to those *in* the brain.

One response to such an argument would be merely to observe that Davidson’s views on semantics are not necessarily consistent with his views on mind, for, according to the former, beliefs are theoretical constructs attributable during interpretation, and it is not clear how theoretical constructs can be token-identical with anything physical. Evnine (1991, conclusion) and Child (1994, chap. 4) worry about this inconsistency, the former going so far as to argue that Davidson’s views on mind should be jettisoned if irrevocably inconsistent with his views on semantics. At the very least, this raises the worry that Davidson’s views on semantics, epistemology, *and* mind might all be inconsistent. Another response would be merely to observe that, regardless of whether there can be only a finite number of beliefs “in” a brain, I just showed that, for Davidson, even in practice, an interpreter nonetheless takes an alien to have an infinite number of beliefs. So, the problem of quantifying over an infinite set remains.

And sixth, Davidson might translate “most beliefs” into some non-quantificational idiom. Perhaps he might articulate PC as something like:

- (vi) *ceteris paribus*, an interpreter takes an alien’s beliefs to be true by her interpreter’s lights.

He might then provide a non-quantificational construal of the *ceteris-paribus* clause. Yet (vi) is no better than (ii), (iii), or (v). For (vi) is consistent with *no* belief of an alien’s being true by her interpreter’s lights. Nor is it clear how translating “most beliefs” into *any* non-quantificational idiom can avoid this problem.

Thus, given Davidson’s views on semantics, none of these ways of handling “most beliefs” succeeds. Nonetheless, Davidson might try a different

tack. He might argue that the problem of making sense of “most beliefs” is merely technical and not worth the attention that I have paid it. Yet only by *ignoring* the problem can Davidson establish his sweeping epistemic conclusions. And so the problem is worth the attention that I have paid it, insofar as one takes Davidson seriously that his views on semantics have epistemic consequences. Nor can one fail to take Davidson seriously about this since, according to Davidson, his “methodology of interpretation is . . . nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning” (1984e, p. 169).

Hence (iv), the only articulation of PC capable of entailing Davidson’s epistemic conclusions is inconsistent with his views on semantics. Yet because such views sanction Davidson’s using PC in the first place—PC is a methodological principle *in* semantics—any articulation of PC inconsistent with Davidson’s semantic views invalidates his using PC generally. Thus, Davidson can use PC either only as a methodological principle in semantics or not at all.¹³

Notes

- 1 That third anthology is Davidson 2001a, itself anticipating publication of Davidson 2004 and forthcoming, bringing the total number of anthologies of Davidson’s articles to five. (See Davidson 2001a, pp. 221–25.)
- 2 Nonetheless, see Malpas (1992, §5.3.3) for a sympathetic discussion of the trickiness of the task.
- 3 “What a fully informed interpreter could learn about what a speaker means is *all* there is to learn; the same goes for what the speaker believes” (Davidson 2001b, p. 148; my emphasis).
- 4 According to Davidson, an interpreter herself has largely self-consistent beliefs; otherwise, according to him, the interpreter could not herself be interpreted, and so could not have *any* beliefs. Thus, the interpreter’s maximizing the self-consistency that she attributes to an alien can be regarded as a further instance of her maximizing her *agreement* with the alien.
- 5 Nonetheless, see n.7 for a further reason.
- 6 In fact, Davidson (1990, p. 319; 1991, p. 195) makes this point in terms of PC. For he says that PC, in the context of a Tarski-style theory of truth, and so in the context of attributing an infinite number of beliefs, is an *alternative* to identifying any belief as expressing an analytic truth.
- 7 There may be a further reason why Davidson switches from “maximize” to “optimize.” Though in later writing Davidson continues to employ PC “across the board” (1984g, p. xvii), he *also* argues that some agreement is more important than others. And, in the context of seeking *weighted* agreement, rather than merely counting the number of beliefs on which there *is* agreement, Davidson sometimes speaks of “optimizing.” (I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.) Nonetheless, this *would* be a further reason, for, as all

- these passages (including 2001b, pp. 138-39, quoted above) make clear, the chief reason for the switch is the worry that an alien has an infinite number of beliefs.
- 8 Davidson's (1984d) argument against scheme-content dualism is also an argument against conceptual relativism. Davidson takes these conclusions to be related to such further conclusions as that there is no such thing as language, in the traditional sense of "language" (1986); that there is no such thing as exclusively subjective knowledge (1988); and that one sees through language, in Davidson's sense of "language," to the world itself (1997).
 - 9 Davidson (1984d) focuses on the translatability of *true* sentences. His omitting "true" here seems a mere *lingua lapsa*.
 - 10 One particular complication in Davidson's argument against scepticism is its invoking the possibility of an omniscient interpreter. For the classic response to this invocation, see Foley and Fumerton (1985).
 - 11 In fact, this excerpt is taken from a passage anticipating Davidson's arguing from PC and the possibility of an omniscient interpreter to the conclusion that skepticism is untenable.
 - 12 One might object that this is an uncharitable construal of "as far as possible." Nonetheless, it is unclear what else Davidson might mean by the phrase.
 - 13 I thank Wayne Davis, Michael Ferry, and several anonymous reviewers for suggestions and some of the objections considered above.

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