

*Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality.* By Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 464. \$65.00 cloth.

A casual reader of Donald Davidson's work on language, mind, and reality cannot fail to notice certain recurring themes, most notably Tarskian truth theories and the project of radical interpretation. Davidson's nearly obsessive focus on these themes reveals, in a dark way, that there is a unifying philosophical system lying behind his pronouncements on traditional metaphysical and epistemological problems. But it is one thing to sense the presence of this system and quite another to articulate its structure in a comprehensive manner. Davidson never accomplished this, preferring to present his views in a series of papers spanning over forty years. In this monumental work, Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig have done for Davidson what he did not do for himself. For those interested in a synoptic account of Davidson's deep but elusive philosophical project, this book is cause for celebration.

One of the most striking aspects of the authors' reading of Davidson is the subtle form of behaviorism that they find at the foundation of Davidson's system. The authors' note that "there is no claim that the concepts of the theory [e.g., meaning and belief] are reducible one by one to behavioral concepts, or that sentences about meaning or belief, and so on, are synonymous with sentences about behavior" (p. 226). Rather, Davidson's behaviorism is the idea that the contents of the concepts of meaning and belief are exhausted by the behavioral evidence for theories of interpretation. That is, there are no facts about meaning and belief over and above the behavioral facts that serve as evidence for a theory of what a speaker means by her words and what she believes. Lepore and Ludwig put this by saying that the concepts employed in theories of interpretation are "purely theoretical concepts," whose content is "exhausted by their application in the domain of evidence in a way that results in the content of the theories' theoretical claims not transcending their predictions about facts in the domain of evidence" (p. 225).

If this assumption is granted, then many of the most distinctive parts of Davidson's system fall into place. If facts about meaning and belief do not transcend facts about behavior, then there should be no problem in principle about confirming a theory of interpretation solely on the basis of behavioral facts. In other words, Davidson's behaviorism provides *a priori* grounds for supposing that radical interpretation is possible. As Davidson has argued at length, the possibility of radical interpretation has certain necessary conditions, in particular the impossibility of massive error in belief and the impossibility of alternative conceptual schemes. Hence, *a priori* grounds for the possibility of radical interpretation are also grounds for these famous Davidsonian views about belief and conceptual schemes.

This line of argument is the core of Lepore and Ludwig's reading of Davidson. They are careful to note conflicting passages, but conclude that this reading "makes the best sense of his overall philosophical project" (p. 173). This sensitivity to conflicting remarks illustrates the care and effort the authors' have taken in extracting a coherent philosophical program out of Davidson's writings. This is not to say that they are wholly uncritical of Davidson's overall position. Unless Davidson can discharge his assumption that the concepts of meaning and belief are purely theoretical, his conclusions are at best conditional. In the final chapter of the book Lepore and Ludwig present interesting reasons for thinking that Davidson has not succeeded in discharging this assumption, concluding that Davidson has given no *a priori* argument for the possibility of radical interpretation. Combined with their earlier argument against the possibility of radical interpretation, this presents an important challenge to Davidson's project.

There are occasions on which Lepore and Ludwig overreach in their effort to defend Davidson against his critics. For example, in a reply to Dorit Bar-On and Mark Risjord, Lepore and Ludwig claim that “the passing theories for interpreter and speaker are not theories they bring to bear on communication, but theories we, as theorists, formulate to describe their dispositions” (p. 290). It is very hard to square this with what Davidson has to say about prior and passing theories in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs.” Another example comes in the authors’ account of Davidson’s position on the relation between a theory of truth and a theory of meaning. They write:

Recall it is not the truth theory *per se*, as we have emphasized, that is the theory of meaning. The truth theory says nothing about what expressions in the object language mean. This mistake has been the basis of a number of criticisms of using a truth theory in a theory of meaning, but these criticisms err by supposing that the truth theory *is* the meaning theory. It is not. (p. 137)

The criticisms are due to J. A. Foster, and more recently, Scott Soames. But Foster and Soames must be forgiven for finding in Davidson the view that a theory of truth is a theory of meaning, for his early papers on this subject, especially “Truth and Meaning” and “Semantics for Natural Languages,” definitely give this impression. It was only later, in “Radical Interpretation” and in his reply to Foster, that Davidson proposed a more indirect relation between the theories. Lepore and Ludwig present the later, more nuanced position as the one that Davidson held all along. This is, I think, unfair to Davidson’s critics and a distortion of Davidson’s early views.

Davidson died unexpectedly in 2003. There is no doubt that the debates about his views will continue. Lepore and Ludwig’s book will be a focal point of these debates, and the authors’ themselves will be recognized as the leading experts on Davidson’s position. From now on, anyone working on Davidson is obligated to learn the lessons of this important book.

*University of Minnesota, Twin Cities*

*Peter Hanks*

*The Russellian Origins of Analytical Philosophy: Bertrand Russell and the Unity of the Proposition.* By Graham Stevens. London, UK: Routledge, 2005. Pp. 208. \$115.00 cloth.

Philosophical theories can often seem but strange and pointless speculations to those who are not aware of what the particular philosophical problem is to which they are meant to provide a solution. Bertrand Russell’s constantly developing views and doctrines are a case in point. In this book Graham Stevens tries to shed light on considerable parts of Russell’s work by explaining how it was intended to solve one major philosophical problem that occupied Russell for half a century: the problem of the unity of the proposition.

According to the early Russell’s terminology, a proposition is not a linguistic entity, but a discrete segment of reality corresponding to a declarative sentence. It does not itself contain words, but the entities indicated by words. Thus the proposition expressed by the sentence “Socrates is mortal” is the *fact* that Socrates is mortal, consisting of the two elements Socrates and mortality. However, it is not just the set of these two objects; after all, the sentence “Socrates is mortal” is not just the list “Socrates, mortality.” Rather, in the proposition that Socrates is mortal the two elements are combined in a certain way. But how? Is there perhaps a third element involved, say, the relation of instantiation, that glues together Socrates and mortality? But that doesn’t really solve the problem: for then we must