

11 Davidson, Russell, and Wittgenstein on the Problem of Predication

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1 Introduction

The last four chapters of Davidson's posthumously published book, *Truth and Predication*, are devoted to what he calls *the problem of predication*. The problem encompasses a metaphysical question – “How are particulars related to universals?” (Davidson 2005, 77), and a semantic one – “How are names or other singular terms related to predicates?” (Davidson 2005, 77). Davidson follows the recent tendency of concentrating on the semantic problem.

After discussing the nature of the problem, Davidson goes on to provide a historical survey of attempts to solve it. He ends by presenting his own solution. Davidson's historical survey has a big gap, jumping from Russell directly to Strawson, thereby omitting Wittgenstein's contribution to the debate. The reason why Wittgenstein is left out is not that Davidson doesn't find his ideas worth discussing. He explains the omission in a note on the manuscript added by the editors as a footnote:

My decision not to talk about Wittgenstein's view needs a comment. The reason is simply that try as I may I cannot satisfy myself that I have a sufficiently justified opinion what his views on predication were. I lament my failure here (as no doubt elsewhere) to fill in an important piece of the picture. (Davidson 2005, 140)

In fact, the gap in Davidson's coverage starts just before Wittgenstein, leaving out, apart from some passing remarks, Russell's contribution after he abandoned the dual-relation theory of judgment in favour of the multiple-relation theory. Since then, Davidson tells us, “Russell did not return to the question of the unity of the proposition, since on the new theory there were no propositions left” (Davidson 2005, 107).

This is an unfortunate gap. I believe, and I hope to show here, that the exchanges between Russell and Wittgenstein, in the two years that Wittgenstein spent in Cambridge working with Russell, constitute one of the

I am grateful to Fraser MacBride for his comments on this material.

most interesting episodes of the history of the problem. My main goal in this chapter is to outline the main ideas to emerge from these exchanges regarding the problem of predication, in its metaphysical and semantic forms. I will close by discussing the nature of Davidson's own solution to the problem.

2 The Metaphysical Problem

The bulk of Davidson's discussion of the problem of predication deals with the semantic version, but he also devotes some attention to its metaphysical form. He presents it in the following passage:

Theaetetus sits. Theaetetus, we agree, is an entity, a person. He is sitting. The property of Sitting is another entity, this time a universal that can be instantiated by many particular entities. In the present case, Theaetetus is one of those entities. In other words, we explain what it is for it to be the case that Theaetetus sits by saying that Theaetetus instantiates the property of Sitting. The fact itself doesn't, then, consist merely of the two entities, Theaetetus and the property of Sitting. It is a fact because those two entities stand in a certain relation to each other, the relation of Instantiation [...] Now we see that a fact we can describe in just two words apparently involves three entities. But can 'Theaetetus sits' consist of just the three entities, Theaetetus, Sitting, and Instantiation? Surely not. The fact requires as well that these three entities stand in a certain relation to one another. To explain this fact we need to mention this *fourth* entity, which, unlike instantiation, is a three-place relation. We are clearly off on an infinite regress. (Davidson 2005, 85)

As Tyler Burge has pointed out, Davidson often blurs the distinction between the metaphysical and the semantical problem (Burge 2007, 589–90). This passage, for example, is presented as an attempt 'to understand the structure and nature of judgments' (Davidson 2005, 85). I agree with Burge that the two problems should be treated separately. I want to start in this section by considering the metaphysical problem, treating the quoted passage as expressing Davidson's views on this.

In Davidson's presentation, the problem concerns an explanation of 'what it is for it to be the case that Theaetetus sits'. On this explanation, the fact is a compound, with a particular, Theaetetus, and a universal, the property of Sitting, as its constituents. The problem arises for the contention that these are the only constituents of the fact. The mere coexistence of Theaetetus and the property of Sitting doesn't produce the fact. The fact that Theaetetus sits could fail to obtain even if both Theaetetus and the property of Sitting exist. In order for the fact to obtain, the particular has to be connected with the universal in the way that we call *instantiation* – Theaetetus needs to instantiate the property of Sitting. But this seems to amount to the admission that the fact that Theaetetus sits has, not two constituents, but three. In addition to Theaetetus and the property of Sitting, we also need to count the (binary) relation of Monadic Instantiation as one of its constituents.

But if this is right, the same line of reasoning can be applied to the current hypothesis concerning the composition of the fact that Theaetetus sits. The mere coexistence of Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation doesn't produce the fact. The three items need to be connected with one another in the way that we call *binary instantiation* – Theaetetus and the property of Sitting (in that order) need to instantiate Monadic Instantiation. But this brings in an additional constituent to our analysis of the fact that Theaetetus sits. In addition to Theaetetus, the property of Sitting, and the relation of Monadic Instantiation, we also need to count the (ternary) relation of Dyadic Instantiation as a constituent of the fact. And since the reasoning can be repeated at each stage, we never reach a satisfactory account of the composition of the fact that Theaetetus sits.¹

On this construal, then, the target of the argument is the application to the fact that Theaetetus sits of an account of facts according to which they are composite items, produced by the combination of particulars and universals. I am going to refer to this as the *Compositional Account of Facts* (CAF). The regress argument, on the construal that we are extracting from Davidson's passage, would refute any account of the structure of the fact that Theaetetus sits that an advocate of CAF might put forward.

Let's consider in some detail how the argument would proceed, on this construal, focusing in the first instance on the most natural application of CAF to the fact that Theaetetus sits:

A1. The fact that Theaetetus sits is a compound with exactly two components: Theaetetus and the property of Sitting.

We will have a refutation of A1 if we can show that it entails its negation. For this purpose we assume A1 and try to show that Not-A1 follows from this assumption. A1 entails that Theaetetus and the property of Sitting are among the components of the fact that Theaetetus sits. But for the fact to be produced, these two items have to be combined in a certain way – the former has to instantiate the latter, and it follows from this that Monadic Instantiation also has to be a constituent of the fact. Hence Theaetetus and the property of Sitting are not the only two components of the fact that Theaetetus sits. Since A1 entails its negation, A1 stands refuted, as desired. The reasoning from A1 to Not-A1 would have the following structure:

A1. (assumption)

B1. The fact that Theaetetus sits is a compound with Theaetetus and the property of Sitting among its components. (from A1)

C1. The fact that Theaetetus sits wouldn't obtain unless Theaetetus instantiated the property of Sitting. (from B1)

¹ A similar difficulty would arise if we construed Instantiation as a single, multigrade relation.

D1. Monadic Instantiation is also a component of the fact that Theaetetus sits.
(from C1)

Not-A1. (from D1)

This inference from A1 to Not-A1 is supposed to refute A1 – a specific account of the structure of the fact that Theaetetus sits. The advocate of CAF might at this point replace A1 with a different account of the composition of the fact that Theaetetus sits:

A2. The fact that Theaetetus sits is a compound with exactly three components: Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation.

But another application of the same line of reasoning would show that A2 entails its negation:

A2. (assumption)

B2. The fact that Theaetetus sits is a compound with Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation among its components.
(from A2)

C2. The fact that Theaetetus sits wouldn't obtain unless Theaetetus and the property of Sitting instantiated the relation of Monadic Instantiation.
(from B2)

D2. Dyadic instantiation is also a component of the fact that Theaetetus sits.
(from C2)

Not-A2. (from D2)

And the same strategy can be used to refute any subsequent proposal as to how CAF can construe the fact that Theaetetus sits. It follows that there is no viable account of the fact that Theaetetus sits along the lines of CAF. In general, CAF cannot provide a viable account of facts.²

Is this line of reasoning sound? Let's focus on the purported refutation of A1. B1 is a logical consequence of A1. The inference from B1 to C1 strikes me as unassailable. If we construe the fact that Theaetetus sits as a compound, the production of the fact will require that its constituents are combined with one another in the right sort of way.

The point at which the argument is vulnerable is the transition from C1 to D1 – from the claim that Theaetetus would need to instantiate the property of Sitting in order for the fact to be produced to the claim that Monadic Instantiation has to be a constituent of the fact. In order to underwrite this inference, we need a principle along the following lines:

CONS. If an entity E is implicated in the constitution of a fact F, then E is a constituent of F.

² Provided, that is, that we rule out a construal of facts as compounds with infinitely many constituents.

In the presence of CONS, the inference from C1 to D1 is unstoppable, but if CONS can be rejected, the refutation of A1 can be resisted at this point.

This is the line taken by Bertrand Russell, just at the point at which Davidson interrupts his historical survey. According to Russell, every complex must have what he calls a *form*, which is the way in which the constituents of the complex are put together. Forms, for Russell, are real entities, not mere abstractions. However, they are not constituents of the complexes whose forms they are, and this, precisely, in order to avoid the regress we are discussing here. He expresses the point in the following passage of the manuscript ‘What is Logic?’, of 1912:

In a complex, there must be something, which we may call the *form*, which is *not* a constituent, but the way the constituents are put together. If we made this a constituent, it would have to be somehow related to the other constituents, and the way in which it was related would really be the form; hence an endless regress. Thus the form is not a constituent. (Russell 1992, 55)³

Since Russell’s complexes include facts, Russell is here rejecting CONS. He accepts that forms are implicated in the production of complexes, but he refuses to treat them as their constituents.

Once we reject CONS, the argument against CAF can be easily blocked. We will be able to recognise the involvement of Monadic Instantiation in the constitution of the fact that Theaetetus sits without contradicting A1. Three entities will be involved in the constitution of the fact – its two constituents and the way in which they are put together, Monadic Instantiation, which is not a constituent. Advocates of CAF who are prepared to follow Russell in rejecting CONS, have nothing to fear from this version of the regress argument.

Now, if the fact that Theaetetus sits obtains, there will also be the fact that Theaetetus instantiates the property of Sitting. This fact will have Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation as its constituents. These constituents will be put together by Dyadic Instantiation, which will not be a constituent of this fact. And in the same way we can describe an infinite sequence of ever more complex facts, all of which will obtain just in case the fact that Theaetetus sits obtains:

- F1. $S(t)$
- F2. $\in_1(S, t)$
- F3. $\in_2(\in_1, S, t)$
- F4. $\in_3(\in_2, \in_1, S, t)$
- ...

But all of these facts will be different from one another, not conflicting accounts of the structure of one and the same fact, as required by the argument

³ See also Russell (1984, 98).

against CAF. Furthermore, by accepting that on her account every fact brings an infinite sequence of facts of this kind in its train, the advocate of CAF wouldn't be accepting that her position is invalidated by an infinite regress. Burge puts the point well: "Such an infinity is profusion, not circularity or regress" (Burge 2007, 592).

So far I have argued that the version of the regress argument that I have extracted from Davidson's passage fails to put genuine pressure on CAF, unless it is supplemented by a cogent defence of CONS. I want to explore next a different version of the argument that doesn't make it depend on CONS.

A clue to the construal that I want to consider is given by Burge, in the continuation of the passage I've just quoted: "Circularity and regress are properties of explanations—of certain representational structures—not of ordinary facts or subject matters" (Burge 2007, 592). The point concerns the sequence of facts, F1, F2 ... I have just argued that CAF is not undermined by the admission that the obtaining of F1 entails the obtaining of the infinitely many facts in the sequence. Using this sequence in a cogent regress argument against CAF would require showing that there is a phenomenon that CAF needs to explain but any attempt to provide this explanation produces a never-ending chain involving this sequence. This is the line that I want to explore next.

Suppose that, as a matter of fact, Theaetetus sits. Now, the existence of Theaetetus and the property of Sitting doesn't entail that Theaetetus sits. Consider, then, a possible state of the world in which both Theaetetus and the property of Sitting exist, but Theaetetus doesn't sit. Call this the *ET-alternative* (for Erect Theaetetus). Which difference between actuality and the ET-alternative explains the fact that Theaetetus sits in the former but not in the latter? According to CAF, the fact that Theaetetus sits is a compound, with Theaetetus and the property of Sitting as its constituents. The constituents exist in the ET-alternative, but the fact doesn't obtain. Why is this?

Clearly the answer that CAF would give to this question is that in actuality, but not in the ET-alternative, Theaetetus and the property of Sitting are combined in the requisite way – the former instantiates the latter. So according to CAF, the reason why the fact that Theaetetus sits obtains in actuality but not in the ET-alternative is that Theaetetus instantiates the property of Sitting in actuality and not in the ET-alternative. This explanans invokes a fact – the fact that Theaetetus instantiates the property of Sitting – that obtains in actuality but not in the ET-alternative. This fact, as we have learnt in our discussion of the previous version of the argument, should not be treated as identical with the fact in the explanandum. The relation of Monadic Instantiation is a constituent of the fact that Theaetetus instantiates the property of Sitting, but not of the fact that Theaetetus sits. What is happening is that the first fact in our infinite sequence, F1, is being explained in terms of the second fact in the sequence, F2. The difference between actuality and the ET-alternative that explains why

F1 is present in the former but not in the latter is that another fact, F2, is present in the former but not in the latter.

This can't be the end of the story. CAF can't treat the fact that F2 is present in actuality but not in the ET-alternative as a brute difference between the two situations. F2 is a fact. Hence, according to CAF, it is a compound. But its constituents – Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation – are also present in the ET-alternative, in which F2 doesn't obtain. So far, we've been told that the reason why the F1-compound is present in actuality but not in the ET-alternative is that the F2-compound is present in actuality but not in the ET-alternative. Until we have an explanation of why the F2-compound is present in actuality but not in the ET-alternative, we won't have a satisfactory account of the difference between actuality and the ET-alternative that explains why F1 is present in the former but not in the latter.

But clearly this line of reasoning launches us on an infinite regress. The reason why F2 is present in actuality but not in the ET-alternative is that its constituents are combined in the right sort of way – that Theaetetus and the property of Sitting instantiate Monadic Instantiation. This amounts to explaining why F2 is present in actuality and not in the ET-alternative in terms of the fact that F3 is present in the former but not in the latter ... At no point in this sequence of explanations will CAF offer a satisfactory account of why F1 is present in actuality and not in the ET-alternative. CAF has failed to identify the difference between these situations that explains why one contains F1 and the other one doesn't.

Needless to say, this brief sketch doesn't amount to a cogent refutation of CAF, but it does suggest that the difficulty is not removed by Russell's idea that what combines the constituents of a fact into a unit is not itself a constituent. This is not the place to continue this dialectic. What I'd like to do before leaving the metaphysical version of the problem of predication is to outline briefly two alternatives to CAF for which the problem might not arise.

One alternative metaphysical picture is the Aristotle-inspired view that the fundamental constituents of the world are not particulars or universals, but a type of entity combining the two – not Theaetetus, on the one hand, and the properties that he instantiates, on the other, but a single entity incorporating Theaetetus and all his properties. On this view, the fact that Theaetetus sits wouldn't be a compound of a multiplicity of components, but an aspect of this unitary whole.⁴ I don't propose to discuss this approach in any detail here. I only want to point out that even if we accept that the view provides

⁴ Davidson ascribes to Aristotle the view that 'if the forms are to serve as universals, then they cannot be separate from the entities of which they are properties' (Davidson 2005, 89), but not the ontology of 'thick particulars' that I have sketched here. I am not claiming that the 'Aristotle-inspired view' was actually held by Aristotle.

a satisfactory account of subject-predicate facts, relational facts might still pose a problem. Suppose that Theaetetus with all his properties is a single fundamental unit, and Socrates with all his properties another. It's hard to see what account we can provide with these materials of, say, the fact that Theaetetus criticises Socrates. For relational facts we seem forced to return to the conception of facts as compounds, facing once again the metaphysical version of the problem of predication.

The second alternative to CAF that I want to consider is a metaphysical picture that takes as fundamental items, not particulars and universals, like CAF, or the particular-cum-universal units of the Aristotelian view, but facts. Facts on this approach are the ultimate, simple constituents of reality, with particulars and universals construed as abstractions from these – as what we see the fact that Theaetetus sits as having in common with the fact that Theaetetus eats, or with the fact that Socrates sits. The approach has been eloquently characterised by Kenneth Olson as

the view that—contrary to what language would lead us to believe—the sort of thing expressed by a whole sentence is metaphysically more basic than some of the things expressed by the words making it up. (Olson 1987, 40)

And, as I have argued elsewhere (Zalabardo 2015, Ch. 4), this is the metaphysical approach put forward in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1974). This fact-based ontology is, precisely, what the opening sentences of the book express:

- 1 The world is all that is the case.
- 1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

This is not the standard interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, but it's certainly not without advocates. It received an early endorsement from Brian Skyrms:

Wittgenstein's truly daring idea was that the ontology of the subject (nominalism) and the ontology of the predicate (Platonism) were both equally wrong and one-sided; and that they should give way to the ontology of the assertion. We may conceive of the world not as a world of individuals or as a world of properties and relations, but as a world of facts—with individuals and relations being equally abstractions from the facts. John would be an abstraction from all facts-about-john; Red an abstraction from being-red-facts; etc. (Skyrms 1981, 199)⁵

The point is not simply that particulars and universals cannot occur in isolation, but only in the context of states of affairs. The claim is rather that, for Wittgenstein, particulars and universals are ultimately nothing but features of states of affairs – John is what the states of affairs that we characterise as involving John have in common, and redness what the states of affairs that we

⁵ See also McCarty (1991).

characterise as involving redness have in common.⁶ I think this is a very plausible reading of the *Tractatus*, but a defence of this point would require a more extensive discussion of the interpretation of the book than we can undertake in this chapter. Hence we will have to restrict ourselves to a conditional conclusion: if this reading is right, as I think it is, then Wittgenstein doesn't face the metaphysical version of the problem of predication. Wittgenstein doesn't have to provide an explanation of how facts arise from the combination of their components because he doesn't think that facts are produced by a process of combination. On the contrary, facts are ultimate, indivisible units of his ontology, in which what we think of as constituents of facts are treated as mere abstractions.

3 The Semantic Problem

I want to turn now to the semantic version of the problem of predication. The sentence "Theaetetus sits" represents things as being a certain way, which may or may not coincide with the way things are. How does the sentence achieve this? The most promising strategy for answering this question is to explain the power of the sentence to represent the world in terms of the semantic properties of its constituents – the singular term 'Theaetetus' and the predicate 'sits'. The semantic version of the problem of predication is to understand how the semantic properties of its constituents enable a sentence to represent the world as being a certain way. On the assumption that the role of singular terms is relatively clear, the problem is seen as concerning, specifically, how the semantic properties of predicates can give rise to the representational power of the sentences in which they figure.

Russell faced a version of the problem in his theories of judgment. Judgments, for Russell, are mental episodes in which we represent the world in consciousness as being a certain way. With his theories of judgment, Russell sought to explain how the mind is related to the world when we judge. A crucial challenge for this enterprise is posed by the fact that judgments can be false as well as true. This circumstance blocks an account according to which in a judgment the mind is related to a fact. The proposal would not work for false judgments. I can judge that Theaetetus flies, but my doing so cannot consist in a relation between me and the fact that Theaetetus flies, since there is no such fact.

Russell's first strategy for overcoming this obstacle was to postulate a range of entities to act as what I am related to when I judge falsely, in the same way in which I am related to a fact when I judge truly. He referred to these items as

⁶ The position I am attributing to Wittgenstein is akin to versions of trope theory that construe particulars and universals as bundles of tropes. See, e.g., Bacon (1995).

objective non-facts, and to facts and objective non-facts together as *propositions*. The view that judgment is a relation between the mind and a proposition, in this sense, is, in a nutshell, Russell's dual-relation theory of judgment.

But by 1910 Russell had abandoned this strategy and had replaced it with an alternative approach that takes advantage of the resources of CAF. On the new approach, there isn't a single item to which my mind is related when I judge. On the contrary, my mind is related to a multiplicity of items – the constituents of the fact that would have to obtain in order for my judgment to be true. When I judge that Theaetetus sits, my mind is related to Theaetetus and to the property of Sitting; when I judge that Theaetetus flies, my mind is related to Theaetetus and to the property of Flying. My judgment that Theaetetus sits is true because there is a fact with Theaetetus and the property of Sitting as its constituents. My judgment that Theaetetus flies is false because there isn't a fact with Theaetetus and the property of Flying as its constituents. This is the central thought of Russell's multiple-relation theory of judgment.

This basic idea had to be refined in several ways before it could provide a satisfactory theory, and between 1910 and 1913 Russell endorsed, in quick succession, several versions of the view. One of the challenges that precipitated these changes was the problem of order, or direction. On the multiple-relation theory, when Othello judges that Desdemona loves Casio, his mind is related to Desdemona, Casio, and the relation of Love. But we can't say that Othello's judgment is true just in case there is a fact with Desdemona, Casio, and the relation of Love as its constituents. Casio loving Desdemona would be a fact with these constituents, but we wouldn't want to say that the obtaining of this fact would suffice for making Othello's judgment true.

What matters for our purposes is a different challenge faced by the theory, one that Russell didn't fully grasp until the 1913 manuscript entitled *Theory of Knowledge*.⁷ The problem arises from the fact that bringing to consciousness Theaetetus and the property of Sitting does not suffice for judging that Theaetetus sits. A mental episode in which I bring these two items to consciousness might fail to represent things as being a certain way. In particular, it might fail to represent Theaetetus as sitting.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, the issue is discussed in its application, not to judgment, but to understanding – in our example, to the understanding of what someone says when they say that Theaetetus sits. Russell states repeatedly what would be missing from an account according to which this understanding consists in bringing to consciousness Theaetetus and the property of Sitting. In order to understand what someone says when they say that Socrates precedes Plato, Russell tells us, it is necessary to understand 'how Socrates and Plato and

⁷ See Candlish (1996) for an account of Russell's growing awareness of this problem as distinct from the problem of order.

“precedes” are to be combined’ (Russell 1984, 99). Understanding the statement ‘a is similar to b’ ‘would not be possible unless we knew how they [a, b and similarity] are to be put together’ (Russell 1984, 101). In order to understand the proposition ‘A precedes B’, in addition to knowing what is meant by the words that occur in it, ‘it is also necessary to know how these three terms [A, B and preceding] are to be combined’ (Russell 1984, 111). And in order to understand ‘A and B are similar’ ‘we must know what is supposed to be done with A and B and similarity, i.e. what it is for two terms to have a relation’ (Russell 1984, 116).

Returning to our example, in order to understand the proposition that Theaetetus sits, in addition to bringing to consciousness Theaetetus and the property of Sitting, I must grasp how these two items are represented as combined by the proposition – how they would have to be combined in order for the proposition to be true, in order for things to be as the proposition represents them as being. I am going to refer to this as the *mode-of-combination problem*. It is the problem of explaining how, in an episode of understanding, the subject is aware of the way in which the items the proposition is about are represented by the proposition as combined with one another – of how these items would have to be combined with one another in order for the proposition to be true.

There’s one approach to the mode-of-combination problem that generates an infinite regress parallel to the regress that we face in the metaphysical version of the problem of predication. On this approach, modes of combination are entities that we are capable of bringing to consciousness. We can bring to consciousness, for example, the relation of Monadic Instantiation, and the mode-of-combination problem is solved for subject-predicate propositions by reference to awareness of Monadic Instantiation. On this approach, I understand the proposition that Theaetetus sits by bringing to consciousness not only Theaetetus and the property of Sitting, but also the relation of Monadic Instantiation. By grasping this relation, I become aware of how Theaetetus and the property of Sitting are represented as combined with one another by the proposition – of how they have to be combined in order for the proposition to be true.

But this proposal doesn’t remove the problem. Bringing to consciousness Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation doesn’t suffice for representing in mind Theaetetus as sitting, and hence for understanding the proposition that Theaetetus sits. The additional object of awareness doesn’t improve matters, as a subject who has brought to consciousness these three items might not grasp the way in which they have to be combined in order for Theaetetus to sit – in order for the proposition to be true: the pair consisting of Theaetetus and the property of Sitting has to instantiate the relation of Monadic Instantiation.

We could try to remedy the situation by introducing an additional object of awareness. What needs to happen to Theaetetus, the property of Sitting and the relation of Monadic Instantiation in order for Theaetetus to sit is that the particular and the property need to bear the relation of Dyadic Instantiation to the relation of Monadic Instantiation. This might suggest that the problem would be solved if we construed understanding of the proposition that Theaetetus sits as involving awareness of the three items already considered *and* the relation of Dyadic Instantiation. But this leaves us in the same situation that we faced before. We are off on a regress. Adding objects of awareness that embody modes of combination does not solve the problem. A different approach is needed.

Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge in the autumn of 1911, with the intention of studying with Russell. He stayed in Cambridge until October 1913. In this period, Russell and Wittgenstein developed a famously intense personal and philosophical relationship. We know that Russell discussed with Wittgenstein the views that he was developing in May 1913 in the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. And Russell's ideas had a profound influence on Wittgenstein's conception of the problems. Wittgenstein encountered the semantic version of the problem of predication in the form that Russell had given to it in May 1913, i.e. as the mode-of-combination problem. I am going to argue that a central component of the position advanced in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* should be seen as Wittgenstein's proposal for dealing with the problem.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, Russell sought to solve the mode-of-combination problem by introducing forms in his analysis of understanding.⁸ But Wittgenstein's pre-Tractarian manuscripts show that, for Wittgenstein, Russell's appeal to forms was fraught with difficulties. Wittgenstein thought that the items that Russell identified with forms (full existential generalisations) couldn't play the role that Russell had assigned to them in his theory of understanding, and, more generally, no entity could play this role. As early as the 'Notes on Logic', dictated in October 1913, Wittgenstein's verdict on Russell's appeal to forms is unambiguously negative: 'There is no thing which is the form of a proposition ... This goes against Russell's theory of judgment' (Potter 2009, 282). Wittgenstein's discussion of these ideas clearly indicates, first, that Wittgenstein was concerned with the problem that Russell had tried to solve with forms and, second, that Wittgenstein was convinced that forms could not be invoked in the solution to the problem.

What is needed is a way of construing the subject's awareness of how, in our example, Theaetetus and the property of Sitting are represented as combined by the proposition that Theaetetus sits. As we've just seen, this cannot be achieved

⁸ Notice, however, that Russell's proposal was not the regress-generating strategy that we have just considered. See Zalabardo (2015, §1.7) for details.

by thinking of the mode of combination as an object and including awareness of this object in our account of understanding. Another approach is required.

We get a suggestion of how this can be achieved if we go back to the unworkable account of judgment with which we started, according to which judgment is a relation between the mind and a fact. If the mind has the power to bring to consciousness the fact that Theaetetus sits and its structure, understanding of the proposition that Theaetetus sits can be explained in this way. By bringing to consciousness the fact that Theaetetus sits, the subject will grasp, not only the constituents of the fact, but also the way in which they are combined with one another in the fact. And this grasp doesn't lead to an infinite regress. We are not invoking a third item, whose connection to the previous two would then have to be grasped. The subject doesn't grasp a mode of combination in isolation. She grasps an actual combination and abstracts from this the way in which its constituents are combined.

This model of understanding offers a solution to the mode-of-combination problem, but, as we have seen, it cannot serve as our general account of understanding, since it's only applicable to the understanding of true propositions. The proposition that Theaetetus flies cannot be understood in this way. This would require bringing to consciousness the fact that Theaetetus flies, but since the proposition is false there is no such fact. The item that would need to be brought to consciousness in order to understand the proposition in this way simply doesn't exist.

Nevertheless, a modification of this approach will give rise to an account of understanding that is equally applicable to true and false propositions. Notice that the source of the problem with false propositions is that the fact grasp of which is supposed to produce understanding is the same as the fact that would make the proposition true. But this is not an essential component of the solution to the mode-of-combination problem. For the purpose of solving this problem, understanding can be taken to consist in grasp of any other fact, provided that its constituents are combined with one another in the way in which objects would have to be combined in order for the proposition to be true. Thus, for example, by grasping the fact that Socrates stutters and its structure, we grasp the way in which Theaetetus and the property of Flying would have to be combined in order for the proposition that Theaetetus flies to be true – they would have to be combined in the same way in which the constituents of the fact that Socrates stutters are actually combined with one another in that fact. The crucial consequence of this move is that the resulting account is applicable to the understanding of false propositions as well as true propositions. The fact that I grasp when I understand the proposition has to obtain, but the fact on whose obtaining the truth value of the proposition depends may or may not obtain.

Hence we have reached an account according to which we understand a proposition by grasping a fact whose constituents are combined with one

another in the same way in which objects in the world (the referents of the terms in the proposition) would have to be combined with one another in order for the proposition to be true. This account of understanding is, I submit, the central idea of Wittgenstein's picture theory of representation. The pictures, thoughts and propositions of the *Tractatus* are the facts that we grasp, on this account, in episodes of understanding.⁹ The claim that propositions represent pictorially is Wittgenstein's solution to the semantic version of the problem of predication.

Wittgenstein states very clearly that what he is calling pictures are facts (TLP 2.141), and that the advantage of using facts to represent the world as being a certain way is that the constituents of a fact are combined with one another in a certain way (TLP 2.14, 2.031), i.e., that the fact exemplifies a mode of combination. This circumstance enables us to use a fact to represent things as combined in a certain way:

2.15 The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.

Hence, by using a fact to represent things as being a certain way, we bring a mode of combination into the representational episode – we represent things in the world as combined with one another in the same way in which the constituents of the depicting fact are combined with one another. And this is achieved without generating an infinite regress. We don't answer the question of how we are representing objects in the world as combined with one another by identifying an additional object that plays the role of a mode of combination, whose combination with the objects it's supposed to combine would then need to be grasped. We are answering the question by singling out an instance of the mode of combination in question: we represent objects in the world as combined with one another *like that* – as the constituents of the depicting fact are combined with one another.

For pictorial representation, then, we can provide a satisfactory explanation of how the way in which objects are represented as combined with one another is brought into representational episodes. Hence, if mental and linguistic representation followed the pictorial model, we would have at our disposal a solution to the mode-of-combination problem. And this is precisely what Wittgenstein goes on to claim. Thoughts are pictures of a certain kind (TLP 3), and propositions give expression to thoughts (TLP 3.1). Propositional representation is then directly characterised as following the pictorial model:

3.14 What constitutes a propositional sign is that in it its elements (the words) stand in a determinate relation to one another. A propositional sign is a fact.

⁹ The main ideas of this account of the relationship between Wittgenstein's picture theory and Russell's theory of judgment were first presented by David Pears. See Pears (1977).

Propositions, like all pictures, are facts whose constituents (the words) are combined with one another in a certain way, and they represent objects in the world (the referents of the words) as combined with one another in that same way. Commentators have often been puzzled by how the pictorial model could apply to linguistic representation. If we think of ‘Theaetetus criticises Socrates’ as a fact, whose constituents are combined with one another in a certain way, it is natural to think of it as the fact, say, that ‘Theaetetus’, ‘criticises’, and ‘Socrates’ are concatenated with each other in this order. But then it seems that ‘Theaetetus criticises Socrates’ cannot represent Theaetetus as criticising Socrates. All it can do is represent Theaetetus, the relation of Criticising and Socrates as concatenated with one another in that order. However, this characterisation of the situation doesn’t take account of two important points.

First, if a proposition is to represent the referents of its constituents as combined with one another in the same way as the constituents are combined in the proposition, then the constituents of the proposition have to have the same combinatorial possibilities as their respective referents. Hence in a proposition that represents Theaetetus as criticising Socrates, the representatives of Theaetetus and Socrates have to be particulars, e.g., the words ‘Theaetetus’ and ‘Socrates’, but the representative of the relation of Criticising has to be a binary relation – e.g., the relation ρ that x bears to y when x is to the left of y with the word ‘criticises’ between them. Then the fact with which ‘Theaetetus criticises Socrates’ has to be identified is not the fact that ‘Theaetetus’, ‘criticises’, and ‘Socrates’ are concatenated with each other in this order, but rather the fact that ‘Theaetetus’ ρ ‘Socrates’.

This might not seem to be much progress, since all we seem to be able to depict with this fact is Theaetetus standing to the left of Socrates with the word ‘criticises’ between them. But here we would be assuming that the constituents of ‘Theaetetus’ ρ ‘Socrates’ are ‘Theaetetus’ and ‘Socrates’, while ρ is the way in which they are combined. We avoid this pitfall if we take account of the second point: thoughts and propositions are pictures of a special kind – they are *logical* pictures. This means, in a nutshell, that the way in which its constituents are combined with one another is a logical mode of combination, with every non-logical aspect of the proposition treated as a constituent. On this construal, the constituents of ‘Theaetetus’ ρ ‘Socrates’ are ‘Theaetetus’, ‘Socrates’ and ρ , put together by the logical relation of binary instantiation – i.e., ‘Theaetetus’ bearing ρ to ‘Socrates’. Now, if ‘Theaetetus’ stands for Theaetetus, ‘Socrates’ for Socrates and ρ for the relation of Criticising, ‘Theaetetus’ ρ ‘Socrates’ will represent Theaetetus, Socrates and the relation of Criticising as combined with one another in the same way in which the constituents of the proposition are combined with one another. In this way, it will represent Theaetetus as criticising Socrates, as desired. I take this to be the

account of how propositions represent that Wittgenstein offers in the following section of the *Tractatus*:

3.1432 Instead of, 'The complex sign " aRb " says that a stands to b in the relation R ' we ought to put, 'That " a " stands to " b " in a certain relation says that aRb .'¹⁰

I want to highlight one controversial aspect of this construal of Wittgenstein's views. If Wittgenstein was trying to solve the mode-of-combination problem, his goal was to explain how to bring into representational episodes awareness of how objects in the world are represented as combined – of how they would have to be combined for things to be as they are represented as being. Read in this way, Wittgenstein's position is that we bring the mode of combination to consciousness by grasping the fact that we use as a picture and its structure – the way in which its constituents are combined with one another. But what form is this grasp supposed to take? One thing seems clear: if this grasp could only take the form of pictorial representation (a picture of a picture), we would be off on a new regress.¹¹ The proposal is only viable if it presupposes a more basic form of grasp of facts and their structure – one that isn't pictorial in nature. I want to close my discussion of Wittgenstein by suggesting that this more basic type of grasp is provided in Wittgenstein's framework by the notion of showing. A picture, he tells us at TLP 2.172, 'displays' (aufweisen) its pictorial form. Our access to logical form is described in similar terms at TLP 4.121: Logical form is 'mirrored' (spiegeln) in propositions, it 'expresses *itself*' (sich ausdrücken) in language. Propositions 'show' (zeigen), 'display' (aufweisen) the form of reality. And the same mode of access is invoked to explain our grasp of the pairings of the constituents of the picturing fact with the objects they stand for: 'one proposition " f_a " shows that the object a occurs in its sense' (TLP 4.1211). On the reading that I have sketched, I would grasp the fact that I use as a picture, its structure, and the pairings of its constituents with their referents, with the faculty that enables me to be a recipient of what is shown. This type of grasp is not explained, but presupposed in Wittgenstein's proposal. It should be clear however that presupposing this kind of grasp doesn't make picturing redundant. What we are presupposing is a faculty of grasping actually obtaining facts and their structure, whereas what we are explaining in terms of this faculty is grasp of combinations that may or may not obtain – the kind of grasp of Theaetetus as flying that enables us to understand the proposition that

¹⁰ For this construal of Wittgenstein's notion of logical picturing, see Zalabardo (2015, §2.5). See also Peter Long's illuminating exegesis of TLP 3.1432 (Long 1969).

¹¹ And, in any case, Wittgenstein doesn't think that the way in which the constituents of a proposition are combined with one another can be represented with propositions. See TLP 4.12.

Theaetetus flies, or judge that he does, even if, as a matter of fact, he's never left the surface of the Earth.¹²

4 Burge's Fregean Solution

Before we turn to Davidson's own approach to the problem, I'd like to consider briefly a solution that Tyler Burge claims to find in Frege's work. In a highly critical discussion of Davidson's ideas on the problem of predication, Burge has claimed that Frege's semantics offer a satisfactory solution of the semantic version of the problem. Burge disagrees with Davidson's claim that "associating predicates with objects such as universals, properties, relations, or sets ... will always lead to an infinite regress" (Davidson 2005, 143). Burge agrees that pairing predicates with universals cannot be the whole solution to the problem, but he thinks that pairing predicates with universals can be part of a satisfactory solution. What generates the regress, for Burge, is not the appeal to universals, but the assimilation of the relationship between predicates and universals to the relationship between singular terms and their referents: 'The regress gets started if the syntactic and semantical roles of a predicate are assimilated to those of a singular term. It is absolutely essential to any solution that this assimilation be rejected' (Burge 2007, 590). We avoid the regress if we recognise that a predicate doesn't simply denote a property. In addition, the predicate of a subject-predicate sentence *attributes* the property to an individual:

The semantical relation between predicate and property is only an aspect of predication. Let us say that the predicate indicates (or predicatively denotes) the property or relation. Beyond indication, predication also constitutively involves a capacity for application or attribution of the property to the individual. Thus predication involves both indication and application of what is indicated to something further. (Burge 2007, 593)¹³

Now, the Russellian construal of the problem of predication that I have been discussing here (the mode-of-combination problem) is significantly different from the construal of the problem that Burge considers, and it may well be that on Burge's construal of the problem, his proposal offers a satisfactory solution. But the question I want to ask is whether Burge's proposal offers a promising avenue for dealing with the mode-of-combination problem.

We can easily adapt Burge's proposal to provide an account of Russell's phenomenon of understanding. An episode of understanding of the proposition that Theaetetus sits would involve bringing to consciousness two items – Theaetetus and the property of Sitting – but each of these items would be brought

¹² On this reading, the faculty of grasping what's shown would be playing for Wittgenstein the role that the notion of acquaintance played for Russell. See Zalabardo (2015, §2.11) for details.

¹³ See also Wright (1998); MacBride (2006, 2011); Liebesman (2015).

to consciousness in a different way. Theaetetus would be brought to consciousness in a purely denotational mode, while the property of Sitting would be brought to consciousness in a mixed mode, which includes both denotation and, crucially, attribution of what is denoted to something else – to the item (Theaetetus) brought to consciousness in the episode of understanding in a purely denotational mode.

Now, if this proposal is going to offer a satisfactory solution to the mode-of-combination problem, the attributive character of the subject's awareness of the property of Sitting would have to allow her to bring to consciousness the way in which the property and the individual are represented as combined – the way in which they would have to be combined in order for the proposition to be true. Attribution, in other words, would have to make the subject aware of the relevant mode of combination. Hence the proposal would have to be supplemented with an account of how attribution achieves this. One possibility would be to contend that the attributive aspect of predicative awareness ensures that when a property is brought to consciousness in this mode, the relation of Monadic Instantiation is simultaneously present to the mind. It should be clear, however, that this approach would take us back to the regress-generating proposal considered above. To provide a promising solution to the mode-of-combination problem, the Burgean proposal would have to be supplemented with an alternative account of how the attributive aspect of predicative denotation furnishes the subject with the requisite awareness. I don't find in Burge's discussion of the problem of predication any suggestion as to how this could be achieved.

5 Davidson's Theory of Judgment

In the final chapter of *Truth and Predication*, Davidson puts forward a solution to the semantic version of the problem. Davidson's solution is based on a lesson we can learn from Tarski's work on truth:

for a language with anything like the expressive power of a natural language, the class of true sentences cannot be characterized without introducing a relation like satisfaction, which connects words (singular terms, predicates) with objects. (Davidson 2005, 30)

This indispensable role of the semantic properties of predicates and singular terms in the specification of the truth conditions of the sentences of a language is supposed to explain their contribution to the power of sentences to represent the world as being a certain way:

If we can show that our account of the role of predicates is part of an explanation of the fact that sentences containing a given predicate are true or false, then we have incorporated our account of predicates into an explanation of the most obvious sense in which sentences are unified, and so we can understand how, by using a sentence, we can make assertions and perform speech acts. (Davidson 2005, 155)

It is not at all obvious how Davidson's solution is to be understood. The answer to this question can be expected to depend on the specific construal of the problem we focus on, and I think we can cast some light on Davidson's proposal in relationship to Russell's project of explicating the phenomenon of judgment and the version of the problem of predication that it faces.

As we've seen, the goal of Russell's theories of judgment was to explain what has to be the case in order for a subject *S* to judge that *p* or, later, to understand the proposition that *p*. Specifically, his goal was to explain how *S* has to be related to the world in order for her judgment to have the content that *p* or for her to understand the proposition as having the content that *p*. From 1910, Russell thought that in order to achieve this the relevant mental episodes would have to be construed as involving a relation (acquaintance) to predicates and universals – to the items that would need to be combined into a unit in order for things to be as represented by the judgment or the proposition being understood. Davidson is unquestionably opposed to this strategy. What I want to consider is what alternative approach to Russell's problem Davidson could be seen as advocating.

Throughout his discussion of the semantic version of the problem of predication, Davidson blames the difficulty on the appeal to universals as referents of predicates. This suggests that the aspect of Russell's multiple-relation approach that Davidson would take exception to is the presence of universals among the worldly relata of episodes of judgment or understanding. If this is so, then a modification of Russell's approach that avoided appealing to universals would meet with Davidson's approval. This can be achieved with the help of Tarski's notion of satisfaction. If we focus on subject-predicate sentences, obviating the need to treat infinite sequences of entities as satisfiers, satisfaction is a relation that particulars bear to predicates: a particular *a* *satisfies* a predicate *P* just in case *P* is true of *a* – i.e. just in case a sentence in which *P* is ascribed to a singular term referring to *a* would be true. Using this notion we can give the semantics of 'Theaetetus sits' without invoking a universal as the referent of 'sits'. The worldly relata of the sentence would be the referent of 'Theaetetus' and those individuals that satisfy 'sits'. The sentence would be true just in case the referent of the singular term is among the individuals that satisfy the predicate. On this account, there are no universals among the worldly relata of the sentence.

We can try to use these ideas to produce a version of Russell's approach that doesn't postulate universal relata for episodes of judgment or understanding. On this position, a predicative judgment would be connected to the world by two relations. On the one hand, it would be connected to an individual by the singular-reference relation. On the other hand, it would be connected by the satisfaction relation to a manifold of individuals – those that satisfy the predicate that would figure in a sentence expressing the judgment.

It is not clear that this move would produce a promising theory of judgment. Notice that the relations of singular reference and satisfaction would have to enable the subject to bring to consciousness their world-side relata. For example, when a subject judges that Theaetetus sits, she would have to have present to the mind Theaetetus and, instead of the property of sitting, the manifold of sitting individuals. But the new requirement is highly implausible. Surely judging that Theaetetus sits cannot require bringing to consciousness every sitting individual.

However, even leaving this difficulty to one side, it should be clear that Davidson would not endorse this approach. This would involve explaining the truth conditions of sentences in terms of the satisfaction conditions of predicates, but it is clear that, for Davidson, the order of explanation proceeds in the opposite direction:

Which of the two semantic concepts, satisfaction or truth, we take as basic is, from a formal point of view, open to choice. Truth, as Tarski showed, is easily defined on the basis of satisfaction; but, alternatively, satisfaction can be taken to be whatever relation yields a correct account of truth ... The second is, I think, the right view. (Davidson 2005, 34–35)

If, as this passage and others¹⁴ indicate, the satisfaction relation is defined as whatever individual-predicate relation produces the right truth conditions for sentences, which truth conditions a sentence has cannot be defined in terms of the satisfaction conditions of the predicates that figure in it, on pain of circularity.

It should be equally clear that Davidson would not support either a return to Russell's dual-relation approach. He certainly doesn't see his endorsement of Tarski's theory of truth as carrying a commitment to this approach:

Tarski provides no entities at all to which sentences correspond or which sentences name, picture, or otherwise represent. No facts appear in the official apparatus, nor do propositions, either as the meanings of sentences or as half-extensional, half-intensional entities in the world as in Russell's early theory. (Davidson 2005, 155)

Davidson's solution doesn't postulate entities that could play the role of worldly relata in a dual-relation theory.

It seems, then, that Davidson would oppose all the strategies with which Russell attempted to explain how a subject has to be related to the world in order for her judgment to have the content that *p* or for her to understand a proposition as having the content that *p*. And I want to suggest that he is not offering an alternative strategy for explaining these subject-world relations. Davidson doesn't think that such an explanation is to be had. Notice that if we had an account of the semantic relations between sentences or judgments and

¹⁴ Davidson (2005, 35–36, 155).

bits of the world, we should be able to derive from it a pairing of true sentences or judgments with facts. However, in *Truth and Predication* Davidson argues forcefully against the idea of a correspondence of this kind: ‘there is nothing interesting or instructive to which true sentences correspond’ (Davidson 2005, 39), since ‘if true sentences correspond to anything, they all correspond to the same thing’ (Davidson 2005, 40). So, for Davidson, it’s not possible to provide an informative pairing of true sentences or judgments with the facts that make them true. But if this is not possible, then, a fortiori, it’s not possible to have an informative account of the relations between sentences or judgments (true or false) and the world from which the former obtain their content. We have to conclude that, for Davidson, it’s not possible to explain these relations between mind or language and the world. His ‘solution’ to the problem of predication is not a strategy for overcoming an obstacle to the provision of this explanation.

It follows that, according to Davidson, linguistic meaning and mental content cannot be explained in terms of relations between linguistic items or mental episodes and the world. How then is he proposing to explain these phenomena? I want to suggest that, in the case of linguistic meaning on which Davidson concentrates, his proposal is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of linguistic use.¹⁵

He expresses the point clearly in the following explanation of what is missing in the Tarskian truth theory with which he proposes to specify the semantics of a language:

What is missing is the connection with the users of language. Nothing would count as a sentence, and the concept of truth would have no application, if there were no creatures who used sentences by uttering or inscribing tokens of them. Any complete account of the concept of truth must relate it to actual linguistic intercourse. (Davidson 2005, 36)

Elsewhere he states explicitly that his views on the connection between truth and meaning are not in conflict with a use-based semantics:

What is clear is that someone who knows under what conditions a sentence would be true understands that sentence, and if the sentence has a truth value (true, false or perhaps neither) then someone who does not know under what conditions it would be true doesn’t understand it. This simple claim doesn’t rule out an account of meaning which holds that sentences mean what they do because of how they are used; it may be that they are used as they are because of their truth conditions, and they have the truth conditions they do because of how they are used. (Davidson 2000, 70)

However, the idea that meaning should be explained in terms of use is often seen as enjoining an epistemic view of truth, according to which we can specify in terms of beliefs or other cognitive attitudes what has to be the case in order for a sentence to be true. And Davidson’s rejection of this view is unambiguous.

¹⁵ For an application of these ideas to mental content see Davidson (2001b).

Here is his verdict on the version of the view according to which truth is warranted assertibility:

I respect this idea for the same reason I respect closely related pragmatic theories, because it relates truth to human attitudes like belief, intention and desire, and I believe any complete account of truth must do this. But theirs cannot be the right way to express the relation. For either the conditions of warranted assertibility are made so strong that they include truth itself, in which case the account is circular, or circularity is avoided by making the conditions explicit, and it then becomes clear that a fully warranted assertion may be false. (Davidson 2000, 67–68)

But his rejection of epistemic accounts of truth doesn't lead Davidson to give up on the project of explicating truth and meaning in terms of use. His hope is that there is a way of achieving this that doesn't take the form of an epistemic view of truth:

there must be some connection [between belief and truth] if we are to relate the truth of utterances to their use. The question is what that connection can be. (Davidson 2005, 42)

Davidson is certainly not alone in thinking that we can explain truth in terms of use without identifying truth with warranted assertibility. The view has been eloquently defended by Huw Price:

pragmatists have often ignored the resources of their own theoretical standpoint—even, in a sense, their own principles—in seeking to equate truth with something like warranted assertibility. A better alternative, in my view, is to seek to explain in pragmatic terms why our notion of truth does not line up neatly with warranted assertibility—in other words, to explain what practical use we have for a stronger notion. (Price 2011a, 16)

Advocates of epistemic accounts of truth seek to replace the analysis of truth as correspondence with an alternative analysis in terms of use. According to Price, their mistake is to think that an analysis is needed. Rather than trying to provide an analysis of the notion, the pragmatist should simply “investigate its function and genealogy” (Price 2011b, 167). Robert Brandom characterises the pragmatist methodology in similar terms, as “beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content” (Brandom 2000, 4).

I want to end by suggesting that Davidson's position fits nicely in this methodological mould.¹⁶ The account of the practice of interpretation offered in Chapter 3 of *Truth and Predication*, and the related account he offers

¹⁶ In a note on the manuscript that the editors have included as a footnote at the end of Chapter 3, Davidson writes: “I want to make clear that my ‘solution’ isn't a basic one. It is an alternative to deflationary, epistemological correspondence theories not in proposing a better *definition* (or short summary) but in suggesting a different approach which relates the concept of truth to other concepts” (Davidson 2005, 75).

elsewhere of the emergence of thought and linguistic meaning,¹⁷ is precisely what is required for an account of semantic phenomena along the lines of the brand of pragmatism advocated by Price and Brandom, among others.¹⁸ If Davidson was indeed pursuing this pragmatist methodology, his explanation of semantic phenomena would not require specifying relations between linguistic or mental items and the world that endow the former with their semantic properties. Since the problem of predication arises within this now redundant enterprise, Davidson's pragmatism would have a good claim to count as his solution to the problem.¹⁹

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¹⁷ See Davidson (2001b, 2001c, 2001a).

¹⁸ I have explored positions in this spirit in Zalabardo (1996, 2000, 2001). My current proposal in this area is outlined in Zalabardo (2016).

¹⁹ Richard Rorty has long advocated a reading of Davidson's ideas along pragmatist lines. See, e.g., Rorty (1986). In *Truth and Predication*, Davidson expresses a partial acceptance of this reading: 'Rorty has compared my views on the nature of truth with Dewey's. I find much of what he has to say on this topic congenial, and I think he is right that in a general way. I share Dewey's attitude toward truth. ... as I read him, Dewey thought that once truth was brought down to earth there were philosophically important and instructive things to say about its connections with human attitudes, connections partly constitutive of the concept of truth. This is also my view ...' (Davidson 2005, 9–10). Concerning the role that he assigns to Tarski's work, he tells us that Rorty 'sees clearly that for me this is related to the rejection of a representational picture of language and the idea that truth consists in the accurate mirroring of facts' (Davidson 2005, 10).

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