

## DAVIDSON'S EXTERNALISMS

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### ABSTRACT

Donald Davidson has deeply contributed to what is nowadays called Externalism. However, the exact formulation of his externalism is not obvious since his externalist commitments are spread along many of his papers. The aim of this work is to explore the details of his externalism. We will point out that Davidson clearly defends that the mind is not self-contained. Nonetheless, this idea acquires at least two different senses under his view: on the one hand, mental states and contents must be individuated in part by factors external to one's skin because the former were caused by the latter; and on the other hand, mental states and contents must be individuated in part by external factors because the mind is constituted by knowledge. We will point out that the apparently harmonious relation between those two levels of explanation turn out to be conflictive at a certain point within the very Davidsonian program.

*Key words:* Donald Davidson, externalism, radical interpretation, mental causation, triangulation.

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## EXTERNISMO DE DAVIDSON

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### RESUMEN

Donald Davidson ha tenido un papel extremadamente importante en lo que hoy se llama Externismo. Sin embargo, la formulación exacta de su externismo no es obvia porque sus compromisos están dispersos a lo largo de muchos de sus artículos. El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar los detalles de su externismo. Indicaremos que Davidson, sin duda defiende, que la mente no está auto-contenida. No obstante, tal idea tiene por lo menos dos sentidos distintos en su trabajo: por un lado, estados y contenidos mentales deben ser individuados, en parte, respecto a factores externos a la piel de uno, porque fueron causados por ellos; y por otro lado, estados y contenidos mentales deben ser individuados por factores externos porque la mente está constituida por conocimiento. Indicaremos que la relación entre estos dos niveles explicativos, aparentemente armoniosa, se vuelve conflictiva dentro del mismo programa davidsoniano.

*Palabras clave:* Donald Davidson, externismo, interpretación radical, causación mental, triangulación.

## Introduction

DONALD DAVIDSON HAS DEEPLY CONTRIBUTED to what is nowadays called Externalism, a philosophical position about the mind, which has its most refereed roots in Hilary Putnam's (1975) and Tyler Burge's (1979) papers. In several of his works, Davidson has stressed that the mind is not self-contained, that it is not independent of the world. He suggests indeed that the mind turns out to be unintelligible within an internalist framework. However, the exact location of his externalism is not obvious since the theses which compose it are spread along many papers.

The aim of this work is to pursue such a location through indicating the externalist theses which Davidson is committed to. We will point out that Davidson clearly defends the externality of the mind. Nevertheless, such an externality gains at least two different senses or explanations under his view, which could serve to characterize two different ways of motivating externalism. We will be especially interested in characterizing the relation between both kinds of "externalisms".

We begin by raising a sort of conflict between Davidson's thought experiment of Swampman and his theses about language and radical interpretation. Such an experiment asks us to imagine a creature, Swampman, which is interpreted by others and seems to interpret them though it misses a mind. Davidson's arguments involved in his theory of interpretation and in his denial of the third dogma of empiricism preclude him to conceive such a creature. Departing from this conflict, we intend to trace a route along some of Davidsonian theories and theses in order to delineate his externalism.

First, we will discuss the Davidsonian idea of triangulation understood as the requirement of causal connections between the individual, her community and the world in order for the mind to emerge. We will then introduce his view about linguistic practices as being the very proof of the idea of triangulation. Once we are interpreters and are interpreted, and as long as we ascribe beliefs and meanings mutually to each other, the fundamental connections between ourselves, the community and the world must have been already established, for there is no sense in talking about mind and about mental contents in the absence of any of the vertexes.

Our next step will be to examine his denial of the so called third dogma of empiricism, the distinction between conceptual scheme and content. With this movement, Davidson is able to conclude that the mind cannot be detached from the world, in the sense that we are knowers. Such a position stresses once more the compulsory role of the community as well the compulsory involvement of the world. The reasons that sustain such a denial, however, respond to his theses about radical interpretation, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

In the sixth section, we will propose two senses by which we can understand Davidson's externalism: on the one hand, mental states and contents must be individuated in part by factors external to one's skin because the latter were caused by the former; on the other hand, mental states and contents must be individuated in part by external factors to one's skin because the mind is constituted by knowledge. Those two senses will correspond to two levels of explication about the externality of the mind.

In the conclusive section we will raise a question about what could prevent us from accepting Swampman as an open possibility within Davidson's externalism. We will offer an overall view about Davidson's theory of anomalous monism, which seems to be in agreement with the scenario where Swampman is created. We will try to defend that nothing intrinsic to such a discourse poses any problem to the viability of a creature such as Swampman. And so we will be back to the tension initially indicated by the paper.

## 1.

LET'S SUPPOSE DURING ONE OF DONALD DAVIDSON'S stays in England, he decides to give himself a break and go for a cruise along Thames Estuary, located in a swampland area. While he is waiting for his boat it starts to rain and, suddenly, lightning strikes a dead tree beside him. Entirely by coincidence, Davidson's body is reduced to the tree elements and the tree turns into Davidson's physical replica. This replica, Swampman, moves exactly as Davidson used to do. He gets into the boat, appears to enjoy the trip and go back to London, where he was giving a series of philosophical interviews. Swampman seems to recognize Davidson's friends, appears to return their questions in English and seems to manage all philosophical theses Davidson used to sustain. No one could tell the difference.

But, there *is* a difference. My replica [Davidson says] can't recognize my friends; it can't *recognize* anything, since it never cognized anything in the first place. It can't know my friends' names (though of course it seems to) [...]. It can't mean what I do by the word 'house', for example, since the sound 'house' Swampman makes was not learned in a context that would give it the right meaning – or any meaning at all. Indeed, I don't see how my replica can be said to mean anything by the sounds it makes, nor to have any thoughts (Davidson, 1987: 19).

In other words, Swampman has no mind. Davidson's mental states have a causal history while Swampman hasn't any, since it appeared only a few minutes ago. According to such an experiment, despite Swampman being interpretable and seeming to be able to interpret others, *it is a thing, it has no mind*.

But then, one could recall the theses involved in the theory of interpretation and the denial of the third dogma of empiricism advanced by Davidson. In those contexts, Davidson argues against the very idea of alternative conceptual schemes. He argues that once we recognize a conceptual scheme, that is, when we recognize someone as a linguistic being, we are already sharing most of our beliefs with such a person. He sustains that "given the underlying methodology of interpretation, we could not be in a position to judge that others had concepts or beliefs radically different from our own" (Davidson, 1974: 197).

Such a methodology of interpretation involves, on the one hand, the interdependence between belief and meaning because, for Davidson, the attribution of beliefs and the interpretation of sentences occur at once. On the other hand, it requires the assumption of a general agreement between interpreter's and speaker's beliefs in addition to the assumption of a great deal of correctness about the speaker's beliefs (Davidson, 1974: 195-196).


When we interpret someone, Davidson sustains, we need to keep some things stable. In an extreme case of radical interpretation, the linguist wouldn't be able to give even a first step towards translation if she doubted simultaneously the meaning of the utterance *Gavagai*, the native's accuracy when he says *Gavagai*, and the nature of the sound as constituting a linguistic

behaviour<sup>1</sup>. According to Davidson, even an ordinary conversation requires keeping something fixed. In order to interpret a sound as intentional, we must suppose that there is someone who intends to say something; that we are dealing with a minded individual. In such a situation, to doubt the mindedness of the creature seems to be blocked.

The Swampman case, however, seems to open the way to turn alternative conceptual schemes intelligible. It is an example of a completely empty scheme with which any other subject would share no beliefs. In that scenario anyone who interprets Swampman is wrong, since there is nobody to be interpreted. This certainly highlights an important tension within Davidson's framework because in many of his writings, Davidson holds that the mind exists inasmuch as it is attributed, and it is attributed inasmuch as it in fact exists.

This may be one of the reasons why Davidson has regretted, in so many passages, the use of such "science fictions" in order to delineate his philosophical positions. And such an idea is our starting point: if the case for externalism can be made with Swampman, it can be even better made without<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.

IT SEEMS THAT IF WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND Davidson's externalism, it would be more appropriated not to depart from the Swampman case, since it represents  say the least- a case of total failure of translatability, what is precisely denied by Davidson in several works. Nevertheless, we could retain some of the theses that surround Davidson's thought experiment in order to reach his externalist commitments, such as the idea that mental states and contents must be individuated appealing to external factors, because the former are caused by the latter. What is more, the external character of the mental involves all the history of such connections instead of isolated events, as



we will discuss Quine's example in more detail in section 5.

<sup>2</sup> We are following Davidson's own observations about his thought experiments such as "I also agree [...] that the argument that summons up an Omniscient Interpreter does not advance my case. As with Swampman, I regret these sorties into science fiction and what a number of critics have taken to be theology. If the case can be made with an omniscient interpreter, it can be made without and better" (Davidson, 1999a: 192).

supposed by Putnam. According to Davidson, such a change in his approach supports the denial of mental's division between broad and narrow contents, and consequently allows the spread of externalism to the mind as a whole.

The classical Twin Earth experiment offers a situation where Oscar1 and Oscar2 use the same word with different meaning in spite of their inability to access the "true" meaning of their terms. From this case, Putnam concludes that psychological states don't determine the extension of the terms. Davidson's criticism towards him indicates that Putnam could have lead externalism much further than he actually did. Davidson highlights that the difference between Oscar1 and Oscar2's causal history precludes us from considering them as being in the same psychological states.

Putnam's route towards externalism begins with his diagnosis of a bad philosophical tradition that has insisted in sustaining simultaneously the following assumptions:

- (I) That knowing the meaning of a term is just a matter of being in certain psychological state [...]
- (II) That the meaning of a term (in the sense of 'intension') determines its extension (in the sense that sameness of intension entails sameness of extension) (Putnam, 1975: 219).

Putnam's externalism emerges from the denial of (I), which charges him with the burden of keeping the correspondent psychological states as narrow ones. Davidson insists that the sort of paradox pointed out by Putnam takes place only when we depart from an internalist view about psychological states. The broadening of externalism conducted by Davidson covers not only meanings, but psychological states in general as well.

When Davidson sustains that the causal history of our terms is what should count for the individuation and the determination of mental contents, he is able to maintain that Oscar1 and Oscar2's minds should be distinct in all aspects, including those states that supposedly provide material for self-knowledge. According to Davidson, "it doesn't follow, simply from the fact that meanings are identified in part by relations to objects outside the head, that meanings aren't in the head" (Davidson, 1987: 31) in the sense that the subject wouldn't know his own thoughts if they were individuated

in an external manner. Davidson states that “to suppose this would be as bad as to argue that because my being sunburned presupposes the existence of the sun, my sunburn isn’t a condition of my skin” (Davidson, 1987: 31). Two burned skins could be visually indistinguishable, but if one of them was caused by the sun and the other not, we should take into account such external factors in order to individuate both injuries. One is a case of sunburn while the other is not.

### 3.

THE TEACHER IS RESPONDING TO TWO THINGS: the external situation and the responses of the learner. The learner is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the teacher. All these relations are causal. Thus the essential triangle is formed which makes communication about shared objects and events possible. But it is also this triangle that determines the content of the learner’s words and thoughts when these become complex enough to deserve the term (Davidson, 1990: 203).

The ideas exposed in (2) acquire a better application when understood under the perspective of Davidson’s notion of triangulation. There can be no mind without any of the vertexes that form the triangle: the individual, the community and the physical world. Since these three factors constitute enabling conditions for the emergence of thought, and since they contribute to determining its contents, the causal relations between those vertexes must be taken into account for the individuation of mental states and events.

However, the triangulation story is neither so brief, nor reduced to the talk about causal relations in isolation. Davidson’s view about interpretation is reflected here once more. He sustains that our linguistic life is the very proof of the idea of triangulation. Once we interpret and are interpreted, that is, as long as we ascribe beliefs and meanings mutually to each other, the fundamental connections between ourselves, the community and the world must have already been established.

Davidson insists on the fact that the distinctive aspect of his concept of triangulation, as a tool to indicate necessary (although not sufficient) conditions for thought and talk, is the introduction of the community pole. Since triangulation can be taken also as a sort of sketch of language

acquisition<sup>3</sup>, the second individual that stands for community does the important job of helping to identify the relevant cause of an utterance in a given situation. Quine had already shown that it was not sufficient for the learner to hear a sentence in the presence of an object in order to grasp its meaning: it is essential that the learner sees that the teacher also sees the object (Quine, 1969: 28). The problem, Davidson argues, is that Quine's "epistemology remains resolutely individualistic" (Davidson, 2001: 10), for he has always insisted on the role of sensory stimulation (the triggering of nerve endings) as the only clue to the meaning of an observational sentence. But who knows something about the patterns of stimulation of another person? In contrast, Davidson noticed early that the option for the distal cause of the stimulus was the only that could serve that purpose. That's why Davidson defends that

Our triangular model thus makes a step toward dealing with another troublesome feature of Burge's perceptual externalism, the indeterminate nature of the contents of perceptual beliefs. That difficulty arose because there seemed to be no way to decide the location of the objects and features of the world that constitute the subject matter of perceptual beliefs; Burge told us only that the content was given by the 'usual' or 'normal' cause. But this did not help choose between proximal and distal stimuli, or anything in between, in the causal chain. By introducing a second perceiver, it is possible to locate the relevant cause: it is the cause common to both creatures, the cause that prompts their distinctive responses (Davidson, 2001: 8-9).

In order to manage that, Davidson seems to suggest that individuals have some kind of natural ability<sup>4</sup> to associate another creature's responses to features of the shared world that possibly have caused such responses. "We are built to discriminate objects, to keep track of them, expect them

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3 As in Quine, for whom the radical translation situation was analogous to the coming of a child into the language practices of a community, the Davidsonian triangulation can be considered as a description of what is in play in radical interpretation as well as a structure of the elements involved in the process of language learning.

4 In fact, one way to conceive this is supposing that such abilities have emerged as result of processes like natural selection. What is important, anyway, is to identify factors that are necessary to make intelligible how thought could ever come out, and this kind of ability was certainly in play there.

to emerge from their hole or from behind trees, and in some cases to feed or eat us”, says Davidson (1999b: 731). But then, once one gets mastery on concept use, and so becomes able to propositional thought, Davidson suggests that “Perception is propositional: when we look or feel or hear we believe. What we are caused by our senses to believe is often true, which in the simplest cases it could not fail to be, since the content of our simplest beliefs is necessarily fixed by the history of past perceiving” (Davidson, 1999b: 732).

So, this makes clear that, according to Davidson, an individual wouldn't have thoughts without having language, which has a social basis in the sense that “without one creature to observe another, the triangulation that locates the relevant objects in a public space could not take place” (Davidson, 1990: 202). Such a social life, which is needed for having a mind, also requires a good deal of actual knowledge, not only of features of the objectively common environment, but of other people's minds as well. The external aspect of the mind is explicated, on the one hand, by the requirement of relations between oneself, her community and the world, and on the other hand, by the mind's being constituted by knowledge. It seems that if causal relations between the three vertexes of the triangle are enabling conditions for the mind, the presence of knowledge is another important requirement in Davidson's account.

#### 4.

THAT THE MIND CANNOT BE DETACHED from the world, in the sense that we are knowers, is a conclusion reached by Davidson when he rejects the so called third dogma of empiricism, the distinction between conceptual scheme and content.

Davidson accuses such a dualism to be committed to the idea that our cognitive and linguistic abilities are organizing activities of a brute material offered by the world through experience. “Conceptual schemes, we are told, are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene” (Davidson, 1974: 183). According to him, this image is all one needs to conceive different conceptual schemes, different systems of concepts that could be untranslatable to one

another, even though sharing the very same objective world. In such a scenario, "Reality itself is relative to a scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another" (Davidson, 1974: 183).

When Davidson refuses the dualism between scheme and content, he undermines the possibility of isolating conceptual form from empirical content, as well as distinguishing between supposed radically different conceptual schemes. His reasons respond basically to the unintelligibility of the idea of relative or alternative conceptual schemes:

For what is the common reference point, or system of coordinates, to which each scheme is relative? Without a good answer to this question, the claim that each of us in some sense inhabits his own world loses its intelligibility. [...] The meaninglessness of the idea of a conceptual scheme forever beyond our grasp is due not to our inability to understand such a scheme, nor to our other human limitations; it is due simply to what we mean by a system of concepts (Davidson, 1988:39-40).

So, a system of concepts cannot be systematically separated from the world in which it was formed. The Davidsonian attack on the third dogma, then, has a double movement: "one of them criticizes the separation of concepts and naked sensations. The second rejects the divorce between world-views or schemes and the universe" (Pinedo, 2004: 271).

According to Davidson, when Quine (1951) denounced the two first dogmas, he banned the image of several worlds seeing, heard or described from the same point of view, a conception of world-views that could dispense with the contribution of the world itself. With this move, Quine provides a kind of warranted contact to the world by concluding that the total knowledge system of a given community gets affected by the world through experience, at least at its periphery. Nevertheless, Davidson argues that the rejection of the two dogmas doesn't prevent us from imagining a single world seen and described from different points of view that would also be untranslatable one into another<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> That is, there can always be a translation between conceptual schemes, in Quine's view, but there is a constitutive indetermination in any translation, which keeps the specter of systematic mistake, or insuperable incommensurability, haunting us. That's why we can say they might be untranslatable.

The rejection of the third dogma is specifically directed towards such a kind of relativism, since even abandoning the two dogmas, as suggested by Quine, we still do not rule out the idea that a community could change completely the standards of its system of beliefs to the point of creating untranslatable conceptual schemes.

Renouncing the third dogma, as suggested by Davidson, also provides a sort of warranted contact with the world, but dispenses with any reference to experience; at least as empiricists conceive it, as having a primary role. Davidson defends that anything that deserves the name of world-view is inseparable from the world that is viewed, and this is enough for one not to require any empiricist explanation of such a contact. The mind is conceivable only as being constituted in the presence of the world.

Given the dogma of a dualism of scheme and reality, we get conceptual relativity, and truth relative to a scheme. Without the dogma, this kind of relativity goes by the board. Of course truth of sentences remains relative to language, but that is as objective as can be. In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false (Davidson, 1974: 198).

The denial of the dualism between concepts and naked sensations means that only within a conceptual environment—within a linguistic community—one could individuate mental contents. According to Davidson, once the third dogma is rejected, there are no reasons to maintain empiricism. The well known Davidsonian slogan “only beliefs justify beliefs” (Davidson, 1983) stresses the idea that any possibility of content’s individuation is carried out by pertaining to a community, and that precludes any appeal to a privileged moment when the world reveals itself barely, as in the Quinean tribunal of experience.

The second important result of rejecting the third dogma is the abandonment of the divorce between world-views and the world itself. Such a conclusion is made apparent when Davidson states that once there is something that suggests the existence of a conceptual scheme, such as a language or a linguistic community, “world content” is already there. Whatever we identify as being “our world vision” cannot be completely isolated from other “world-views”, nor from the world itself.

In this sense, the rejection of the third dogma turns compulsory the role of a community as well as the participation of the world. There are not several possibilities of organizing the supposed brute material offered by the world, all untranslatable between each other. The world itself must be present in our actual understanding activities, even if we don't have absolute warrants about which part of our belief systems is more accurate than others.

## 5.

THE COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION OF BOTH THE WORLD and the community sustaining the talk about mental contents is a conclusion afforded by Davidson's account on radical interpretation.

Quine (1960) asks us to imagine a case of a community completely isolated from any other on earth and, in addition, a linguist who goes to such a community in order to elaborate a translation manual. The linguist observes numerous situations, for example, one where a rabbit runs in front of them and the natives say "Gavagai". The linguist takes note of this verbal behaviour and translates it as "rabbit".

Quine stresses that such a translation hypothesis will be tested in similar future circumstances in order to corroborate the linkage between the stimulus and the verbal behaviour. In addition, given the plurality of stimuli that could have provoked such an emission of sound, the hypothesis at hand will be put under the approval of someone from the community. In that case, the linguist should be able to perceive the native's assent or dissent in front of the question "*Gavagai?*". Given the complexity of this whole situation, Quine concludes that the indetermination of translation should be the case. Mistakes and failures could be managed or diminished, but the method of translation should be considered in fact as inconclusive if our aim was the search for synonymies.

Nevertheless, Davidson considers that the situation proposed by Quine has many other features that should receive more of our attention. According to Davidson, the very activity of the linguist in such a community –taken at first as having a completely different conceptual scheme– would require the satisfaction of some important conditions, such as the linguist's ability for perceiving what could count as being

verbal behaviour. Davidson emphasises that to perceive something as a conceptual scheme isn't given to us at all. Perceiving some behaviour as a contentful linguistic one puts us automatically in a comprehensive position of such a conceptual system, in the sense that it cannot be completely isolated from our own:

Radical interpretation establishes that something meaningful cannot be understood in isolation from other meaningful things, but rather globally: when we make sense of someone's speech or rationalize her behaviour we need to assume a shared world which is inconceivable independently of a shared intentional net. Davidson dedicates to this idea one of his most subtle arguments: his rejection of the third dogma of empiricism (Pinedo, 2006: 11).

In the absence of such a shared net of beliefs, one couldn't even recognize verbal behaviours as meaningful assertions in the so considered isolated community. One couldn't recognize such a community as a linguistic one. That is the key of the Davidsonian insistence in the interdependency between meanings and beliefs.

The attribution of beliefs and the interpretation of someone's words occur simultaneously, as aspects of the same practice. That is why Davidson maintains that someone's speech cannot be interpreted unless a good part of what the speaker's beliefs are about is known by the interpreter. The elaboration of a translating manual doesn't require only a good match between native words and ours. It is an activity not only of translating other's language into ours, it involves the description of other's attitudes as well (Davidson, 1974: 186). And to describe someone's attitudes is an activity of ascription of mental states, such as beliefs and desires.

Davidson sustains that the basis of our interpretation activities is the sharing of beliefs and, in addition, it requires from us the attribution of correctness to the person we are interpreting. The extreme situation of radical interpretation stresses the myriad of mistakes the linguist is subject to. She could be wrong about her choice of translation and the native could be wrong in using a term of his own language. However, Davidson insists, interpretation is only possible if we don't take into account all the possibilities of

mistake involved in any situation. Because of this, Davidson defends that we need to ascribe a great deal of success to our interpreter<sup>6</sup>, a condition known as the principle of charity:

Since charity is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. (...) 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 (Davidson, 1974: 197).

The method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation – some foundation – in agreement. The agreement may take the form of widespread sharing of sentences held true by speakers of ‘the same language’, or agreement in the large mediated by a theory of truth contrived by an interpreter for speakers of another language (Davidson, 1974: 196-197).

We have seen that sharing beliefs constitutes an enabling condition for interpretation. We have also seen that such an idea gives place to the rejection of a solipsistic isolation between different conceptual schemes. The so called “relative world views” cannot be enclosed within themselves. Following this same line of reasoning, we could also say that Davidson provides us with means to reject the idea of a speaking individual isolated inside her own world. Given that the conditions for radical interpretation apply to foreign situations as well as to domestic ones, we are able to state the impossibility of one’s own isolation from every other individual. There is no sense in talking about private worlds.

Besides sharing beliefs and attributing truth to other’s beliefs in order to interpret them, Davidson defends that radical interpretation requires that a great deal of those beliefs must be indeed true. This fact turns knowledge as another enabling condition for interpretation, an important one which by itself prevents us from being isolated from the world. Davidson defends that:

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<sup>6</sup> This does not mean we have to ascribe success in all situations, but that the ascription of error is intelligible only against the background of massive success.

Until a base line has been established by communication with someone else, there is no point in saying one's own thoughts or words have a propositional content. If this is so, then it is clear that knowledge of another mind is essential to all thought and all knowledge. Knowledge of another mind is possible, however, only if one has knowledge of the world, for the triangulation which is essential to thought requires that those in communication recognize that they occupy positions in a shared world. So knowledge of other minds and knowledge of the world are mutually dependent: neither is possible without the other. [...]

Knowledge of the propositional contents of our minds is not possible without the other forms of knowledge since there is no propositional thought without communication. It is also the case that we are not in a position to attribute thoughts to others unless we know what we think since attributing thoughts to others is a matter of matching the verbal and other behaviour of others to our own propositions or meaningful sentences. Knowledge of our minds and knowledge of the minds of others are thus mutually dependent (Davidson, 1991: 213).

## 6.

AT THIS POINT, WE ALREADY HAVE IMPORTANT clues to understand Davidson's externalism. On the one hand, Davidson justifies the individuation of the mental with reference to external factors because our mental contents and states are caused in some sense by those factors. I am in relation to my community and to the world in a way that those relations provide externality to my mind. On the other hand, the individuation of the mental with reference to external factors is justified because the mind is constituted by knowledge, a mental state that by itself could not lack an external aspect<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Williamson (2000) indicates that part of the resistance to externalism lies in the insistence of defining knowledge. According to Williamson, knowledge should not be considered as the result of the articulation between something internal (belief) and something external (truth) through justification. The very notions of beliefs and justification depend for their intelligibility on the notion of knowledge. Although Davidson defends that we are knowers, it is not clear whether Davidson would accept Williamson's approach on knowledge.

This double aspect of Davidson's position suggests two levels of explications about the externality of the mind<sup>8</sup>, which could be characterized respectively by the following conditions:

*EC1 (explanatory condition 1):* mental states and mental contents must be individuated in part by external factors to one's skin because the former were caused by the latter.

*EC2 (explanatory condition 2):* mental states and mental contents must be individuated in part by external factors to one's skin because the mind is constituted by knowledge.

Those explanatory conditions seem to refer to matters so distinct from each other that they deserve to be treated separately. On one level, the mind has an external character because we've been in causal relations with the world and with the community, while on the other level the mind is not self-contained because it is necessarily composed by knowledge. Both conditions constitute Davidsonian externalism, but it is useful to recognize that EC1 provides an extrinsic relation between mind and world while EC2 gives space to an intrinsic one<sup>9</sup>.

In the previous sections we have seen that our interpretation activities only stand in the presence of knowledge. Davidson's rejection of the third dogma involves an important aspect of our communicative activities that is the intrinsic connection between world visions and the world itself. There is no way to give sense to the idea of an "alternative conceptual scheme" because once we recognize someone as having a conceptual scheme (or, to avoid the jargon, as being a conceptual creature) we are inevitably attributing to her, and so sharing with her, meanings and beliefs at once. There is no sense in considering her as an intentional being, and still regard

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8 We are deliberately not considering the division between "social externalism" and "perceptual externalism", suggested by Davidson (2001), as an important trait of his externalism, since it's clear that Davidson insists on the necessity of the community and of the world. We are inclined to think that such a division is superficial and disguises the relevant differences between externalisms.

9 Davidson recognizes that externalism is an alternative to subjectivism when it "makes the connection between thought and the world intrinsic rather than extrinsic – a connection not inferred, constructed, or discovered, but there from the start" (Davidson, 2001: 2).

her as an unintelligible speaker in principle<sup>10</sup>. One cannot understand my beliefs and simultaneously believe that all of them are false. Besides sharing beliefs, Davidson concludes that most of such beliefs should be indeed true. Knowledge is so identified as a necessary condition for interpretation.

Davidson (1991) stresses that knowledge of the world is necessary, but so are knowledge of other minds and self-knowledge. The interdependence between these three kinds of knowledge is another important condition defended by Davidson. But one may ask at this point: if the mental is conceived as necessarily composed by knowledge, why insist in extra conditions to justify the external character of the mind? If our interpretation activities are evidence of our having knowledge, it seems that such a fact would be enough to explain the external character of the mind. Once we take such a step there is no way back to conceive the mind as detached from the world.

Davidson clearly defends both levels of explications and more than that, he seems to indicate that EC2 is subsidiary of EC1. In the Davidsonian picture, that the mind is necessarily constituted by a good portion of knowledge seems to respond to the idea that we are embedded in causal relations<sup>11</sup>: the objectivity of the mind emerges from the triangulation conceived as composed by causal relations. One way of interpreting Davidson's insistence on such an aspect is seeing it as a grounding of the epistemological and semantic features of his position on a metaphysics that is coherent with his commitment to physical monism. In this sense, causal relations can be read as stressing the fact that all the events can be considered are physical ones: that's why the triangular relations are ultimately causal. And even if Davidson has always made clear that causal relations do not bear semantic content, it may not be so simple to render triangulation intelligible, as presenting the explanatory role it has, once one insists that such an ontology of purely causal physical events makes some features of mind and meaning quite mysterious<sup>12</sup>.

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10 She may turn out to be unintelligible for other reasons, which include, for example, some kinds of disease, but she cannot be unintelligible because of the contents of her beliefs or the meanings of her words. See Davidson (1973).

11 It seems that both explanatory lines could be sustained separately. Williamson (2000) offers us an example of such a possibility when he considers knowledge as being a mental state which is prior conceptual and metaphysically to the one of belief.

12 Consider, for instance, what Chalmers (1995) coined as "the hard problem of consciousness".

## 7.

BUT, WHAT DOES PREVENT US FROM CONCEIVING SWAMPMAN as an open possibility within Davidson's externalism? We have refused to take such an experiment as the representative case of Davidson's externalism because amongst other things Davidson himself has claimed that it is not a good example of it. However, it was also indicated that more than being a non-representative case, Swampman expresses an important internal tension within Davidson's framework.

The Davidsonian solution to the mind-body problem –his so called “anomalous monism”– is a position that respects the following principles:

- i. Principle of Causal Interaction: “at least some mental events interact causally with physical events” (Davidson, 1970: 208).
- ii. Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality: “where there is causality, there must be a law: events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws” (Davidson, 1970: 208).
- iii. Anomalism of the mental: “there are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained” (Davidson, 1970: 208).

Although such principles could be considered as controversial when held together, Davidson defends that there is a way of maintaining all of them simultaneously by embracing anomalous monism. Amongst the theses involved by such a position there is one regarding individuation, according to which an event is individuated with respect to its causes and its effects (Davidson, 1969); and also one establishing that it is possible to talk about causes and effects using a physical vocabulary as well a mental one (Davidson, 1963).

Davidson maintains the monism about events by stating that there are not two classes of events, one physical and the other mental. Instead, there is just one kind of events that could have two descriptions, one physical and another mental. He stresses that every mental event has a physical description but not the other way round. Davidson sustains a Humean notion of causality which allows him to retain the discourse about laws,

but at the level of events, not of its descriptions. Davidson's central idea is that causal relations are established between events, independently of their descriptions, although a nomological law could only appear under a physical description. Such a position entails that a mental event could be described physically, and then could be part of causal relations even if the idea of psycho-physical laws is rejected (Davidson, 1967). This way, Davidson maintains the anomalous character of the mental while he is able to sustain the identity between physical and mental states.

The Swampman experiment is not disconnected from this part of Davidson's philosophy. In the same context where he proposes Swampman, he indicates that one of the reasons why people consider it so difficult to conceive psychological states as external ones lies in the fact that nobody has countenanced an approach like "anomalous monism". According to Davidson, once it is possible to talk about psychological states within the sphere of causality, the supposed problem seems to be solved. Considering that Swampman has no causal history, neither physical nor mental, and considering that any mental state that pertains to the real Davidson is part of a causal net that the replica lacks, their minds must be completely different (assuming it makes sense to speak of Swampman's 'mind').

At this moment, it seems clear that nothing intrinsic to this discourse poses any problem to the viability of a creature such as Swampman being taken in our linguistic practices. And we are back to the tension initially indicated by the text. Our impression is that if the second explanatory level of externalism -that which refers to the constitution of mind by knowledge- is subsidiary of the first one, EC2 arrives too late to disallow the conception of a creature such as Swampman, mainly because in interpreting its utterances, part of what one has to concede is that those words were learned in the presence of causal relations. And if such a creature lacks those relations, and still presents all that is required to count as a minded being, it will certainly be attributed with propositional thought. There's no way of checking embeddedness in causal relations in past history of learned language. And the point is that checking embeddedness is certainly not part of the history.

EC2 is the externalist explanatory condition which maintains that "mental states and contents must be individuated by external factors because the mind is constituted by knowledge". It was suggested that such a level of

explanation is able to give space to an intrinsic relation between mind and world, since knowledge is a sort of mental state that could not be conceived as detached itself from the world. Nevertheless, Davidson seems to suggest that EC2 is dependent of another level of explanation, EC1.

EC1 states that mental states and contents are caused by external factors and, because of that, the former must be individuated by the latter. This provides an external character to the mind due an extrinsic relation between mind and world. EC2 is related to EC1 in the sense that EC1 is more fundamental than EC2, at least from a metaphysical point of view. That the mind has knowledge within its constituents is a result of causal relations between an individual, her community and the world. Only in a second stage interpretation seems to come into the scene. In that sense, when Swampman is finally taken to be an unintelligible creature, he was already there; he has been interpreted and has interacted with our fellows, even lacking a mind. Needless to say that scepticism concerning other minds does not get blocked in this explanatory strategy, what would require turning it upside down, and giving priority to EC2. In fact, that seems to be Davidson's position after having regretted the thought experiment: from the fact that mind is constituted by knowledge, it is possible to infer that language was learned in the presence of causal relations. This sort of movement may assure the rejection of positions such as the ones defending that "the views generally called 'externalist' do not form a particularly interestingly interconnected family of theses" (Hahn, 2003: 29). Locating Davidson's commitments to externalism, as we pursued to do, had in view precisely presenting a picture of why Davidson could so clearly emphasize that "what I think is certain is that holism, externalism, and the normative feature of the mental stand or fall together" (Davidson, 1995: 122).

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