Introduction

Claudine Verheggen

> I'm not interested in constructing a building so much as in having a perspic-
> uous view of the foundations of possible buildings.   (Wittgenstein 1980, 7)

> Maybe those long hours I spent years ago admiring and puzzling over the
> *Investigations* were not spent in vain.   (Davidson 1999, 286)

Ludwig Wittgenstein and Donald Davidson are two of the most formidable
figures of twentieth century philosophy, equally influential, equally controver-
sial. It would be hard to overstate the importance and the extent of the influence
they have had and continue to have on contemporary philosophers working in
a great many areas of philosophy. Yet, they are typically taken to be engaged in
two radically different ways of doing philosophy. On the one hand,
Wittgenstein is widely understood to be a deflationary philosopher, who
recommends that philosophical problems be dissolved rather than solved, and
thus that no constructive philosophical thesis be advanced. Davidson, on the
other hand, is widely acknowledged to be a theory builder, a systematic
philosopher par excellence, whose views about the nature of language and
thought are intended to have consequences for most areas of philosophy. Given
these alleged differences, it is perhaps no wonder that, though the writings of
each philosopher have generated volumes of commentaries, some of which
compare them to other leading philosophers, there has so far been no book
comparing Wittgenstein and Davidson.

The purpose of this volume is to demonstrate that this is a serious lacuna,
resulting, at least in part, from a serious misreading of both philosophers. There
is in fact much that Wittgenstein and Davidson share (as Davidson himself was
increasingly recognizing in the last fifteen years of his life) and much to be
learnt from investigating them side by side. In one way or another, the chapters
in this volume address these commonalities or "family resemblances", as it is
tempting to call them. Some of the chapters aim at establishing these resem-
blances, thereby reinforcing particular claims being advanced by both philo-
sophers. Some of the chapters use the arguments of one philosopher to improve
on the views of the other. All aim either at presenting more compelling defences
of the views of one or the other, or both, of these philosophers, or at developing

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more coherent and convincing versions of their views than either philosopher put forward on his own. Thus the volume is not primarily exegetical, though the authors have also taken great care to get the texts right. Rather, the volume demonstrates how philosophically fruitful and constructive reflection on Wittgenstein and Davidson continues to be, and how relevant the writings of both philosophers are to current debates.

Not only do family resemblances between Wittgenstein and Davidson get established and elaborated upon by most authors in the volume, some family resemblances are also to be found among the authors themselves. In addition, interestingly, certain family resemblances between Wittgenstein and Davidson asserted by some authors are denied by others. The volume thus reveals, as Wittgenstein would have put it, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small" (Wittgenstein 1953, §66). In what follows, I shall draw an outline of the most significant of these similarities, describing thereby the structure and main themes of the book.

It starts where Davidson started, with his causal theory of action introduced in 1963. Interest in this theory has recently been revived along with interest in one of the works Davidson was reacting to, viz., *Intention*, by the famously Wittgensteinian Elizabeth Anscombe. Two worries that have always plagued Davidson's theory concern the problem of deviant causal chains and the problem of weakness of the will. Robert Myers argues that these worries can to a large extent be overcome once the theory is outfitted with a more thoroughly holistic account of pro-attitudes, instead of the standard Humean account usually attributed to Davidson. The problems of deviant causal chains and weakness of the will can then be seen as problems of detail, as Davidson always suggested, and the differences between Anscombe's version of the non-causal theory and Davidson's version of the causal theory can be seen as significantly reduced, as Davidson always intended.

The chapters that come next address one or the other facet of Wittgenstein's and Davidson's discussion of natural language and its relation to thought and to reality. A primary interest in these topics was shared by the two philosophers throughout their lives. This focus was true of both the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and the later Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*. And it was true of both Davidson's early views on radical interpretation, the interpretation from scratch of a person's language and thoughts, and his later views on triangulation, the idea of two creatures responding simultaneously to each other and to the world they share. The family resemblances emphasized by all authors are between the later Wittgenstein and Davidson. But different authors focus on different periods of Davidson's work. What they all recognize is that Wittgenstein and Davidson both see an important connection between the way we use our

words and what we mean by them, but they exploit this connection in importantly different, though overlapping, ways.

Paul Horwich is in fact reticent to attribute to Davidson a use-theory of meaning, for he thinks that Davidson would take it to be incompatible with his truth-theoretic view of meaning, in particular, his truth-conditional account of compositionality. But he also thinks that Davidson is wrong to insist on this truth-conditional account – a superior, deflationary account is in sight, which is compatible with a Wittgensteinian use-theory of meaning. Moreover, it would be easy for Davidson to adopt the deflationary account, since his own account of interpretation possesses all the seeds of a use-theory of meaning. Indeed, Horwich sees an important parallel between Davidson's idea that interpretation is guided by the principle of charity, and thus based on agreement between interpreter and interpretee, and Wittgenstein's idea that interpretation is guided by use, and thus based on the shared practice of accepting sentences. This "transformation" of Davidson into Wittgenstein would have him abandon his non-deflationist theory of truth and embrace an explanation of truth in terms of meaning, rather than the other way around, as Davidson himself would have it. But is such a transformation necessary?

Some philosophers think not. One of these is Åsa Wikforss, who argues that a truth-conditional theory of meaning is perfectly compatible with a meta-semantic theory that puts communication, and therefore use, at its centre. Thus, according to her, the view of a use-theorist like Wittgenstein is perfectly compatible with the view of a formal semantics theorist like Davidson. Indeed Davidson defends both views. The key is to recognize that the truth-theory is supposed to be the answer to the question what one could know that would enable one to interpret another person's words, which is different from the meta-semantic question how one could know it, to which radical interpretation is the answer. It is at this foundational, meta-semantic level that Wittgenstein and Davidson have much in common. Wikforss argues that Davidson's principle of meaning determination, the principle of charity, is similar to Wittgenstein's, since both recommend that facts about use be mapped onto meanings and semantic correctness conditions, and thus both emphasize the need for agreement in beliefs and judgments for there to be communication. As she says, "the device of the radical interpreter is meant precisely to illustrate how use determines meaning" – on this much she and Horwich agree. The discussion of meaning determination brings out, according to Wikforss, another similarity between Wittgenstein and Davidson. Contra many commentators, she maintains that Wittgenstein did not believe that meaning is determined by conventions, just as Davidson did not. However, Wikforss ends up remarking, Wittgenstein and Davidson's insistence that meaning is determined by use entails that meanings cannot be "perfectly objective".

This is also the conclusion reached by Kathrin Glüer, who finds in Davidson's writings an answer to Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox,

a paradox which seems to pose a serious threat to the idea that linguistic expressions can ever be meaningful. Glüer argues that it is thinking of meaning as use, or as determined by use, that leads Wittgenstein to the paradox, for, she asks, if meaning is use, how could meaning determine "a potential infinity of objectively correct applications?" She then considers the account of meaning determination Davidson offers in his writings on radical interpretation as a possible answer to Wittgenstein's paradox. Radical interpretation is based on a premise shared by Wittgenstein and Davidson, viz., that language is essentially public. Thus, according to the account of radical interpretation, meanings are determined in two steps: first by detecting the interpretee's attitudes of holding true uninterpreted sentences in given circumstances, and then by having these attitudes determine meanings via the principle of charity. The interpreter, as Glüer emphasizes, plays an essential role in determining meaning, and thus only what speakers are "sensitive" to is eligible to be meant. The problem of objectivity seems therefore to remain with us. Does it, however?

Claudine Verheggen's paper might well be read as suggesting that it does not, not because Davidson succeeds in solving it but, rather, because, following Wittgenstein, he succeeds in dissolving it. Verheggen, too, tackles Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox and argues that the considerations that lead him to the paradox are similar to the considerations that lead Davidson to develop his account of triangulation and thus the claim that one's possession of language and thoughts requires one to interact linguistically with others and the world around them. She further argues that, with Wittgenstein's help, Davidson is in a position to vindicate the premise that language is essentially public, which in turn solidifies Davidson's approach to meaning and his account of meaning determination. Key to the argument is the claim that, according both to Wittgenstein and to Davidson, when reflecting on the connection between meaning and use, we should not conceive of use in non-semantic terms, but we should think of it as the meaningful use of words by people engaged in communication. Thus Verheggen argues that Wittgenstein and Davidson are both fierce non-reductionists, though she also believes that their non-reductionism is compatible with non-quietism.

Though he does not use the word 'non-reductionism', Barry Stroud argues that this is the fundamental idea shared by Wittgenstein and Davidson. Stroud stresses the importance they both bestow on ostension in learning language and for the words learnt to mean what they do. He also stresses the claim that for neither of them is ostension sufficient for language learning. What is needed, in addition, is mastery of the grammatical structure of language. This is a mastery that can be described, following Davidson, by a truth-conditional theory of meaning, which, according to Stroud, finds its equivalent in Wittgenstein's talk of a speaker's grasp of the "place in language, in grammar" that is assigned to different kinds of word. Thus Stroud, too, sees no conflict between a truth-conditional theory of meaning

and the idea that use and meaning are essentially connected. But it is crucial to keep in mind that the relevant use can only be described intensionally, which is to say that, ultimately, we can account for speakers meaning what they do by their words only by saying what the words they use are used to mean.

Jason Bridges further investigates the themes developed in the two previous chapters with an in-depth examination of Wittgenstein's search for the "essence of human language". Bridges construes this as the search for an explanation of linguistic meaning that would be "external" to our understanding of meaning in use. And he articulates the many ways in which Wittgenstein takes this search to be futile. There is no way we could achieve such an external perspective, e.g., by positing "meanings" as external objects, or mental processes alleged to give "life" to otherwise "dead" signs. Nor would appeal to the notion of reference help, for our understanding of what words refer to is itself dependent on our understanding of what speakers use their words to mean. Contra the two previous authors, Bridges is not convinced, however, that Davidson does not part company with Wittgenstein on this issue. Though he grants many similarities between Wittgenstein's and Davidson's approach to meaning and acknowledges Davidson's non-reductionist aspirations, he finds in Davidson's account of radical interpretation a desire still to achieve an external perspective on meaning.

With the next two chapters we turn our attention to the relation between language and thought. Hans-Johann Glock addresses the question whether there can be thought without language and, in particular, whether non-linguistic animals can have thoughts. He highlights the many similarities that form the background of Wittgenstein's and Davidson's views on the topic, centrally, their third-person approach to mental phenomena and their insistence that thoughts be manifestable in behaviour. He then argues that Davidson is wrong in maintaining that possession of thoughts of any kind requires language and its manifestation in linguistic behaviour. A better, more moderate position can be found in Wittgenstein, according to whom non-linguistic animals can have "beliefs, desires and intentions of a simple kind, namely, those that can be expressed in non-linguistic behaviour." In particular, non-linguistic animals can have beliefs about the perceptible features of their environment, which can be attributed on the basis of their reactions to their environment. However, the simple beliefs that are attributed are "neither intensional nor conceptual nor holistic in the way attributions of the same thoughts to linguistic subjects are." On this Wittgenstein can be seen to agree with Davidson. Another similarity highlighted by Glock concerns Wittgenstein's and Davidson's views of first- and third-person ascriptions of mental predicates. This is the focus of the next chapter.

William Child brings out the essential connection between use and meaning acknowledged by Wittgenstein and Davidson by focusing on their

accounts of mental terms and concepts and, in particular, on the questions whether, and if so how, mental terms can have the same meaning in their first-person and third-person uses, since we ascribe mental predicates to others on the basis of their behaviour and we ascribe them to ourselves without evidence. Davidson maintained that Wittgenstein did not even try to meet the explanatory challenge prompted by the asymmetry. Child, however, retorts that Davidson's explanation is itself less than adequate, coming down, as it does, to regarding people's self-ascription of mental properties without reference to their behaviour as a "basic, unanalysable fact". Child then goes on to argue that a satisfactory explanation can in fact be uncovered in Wittgenstein's writings, an explanation, moreover, that Davidson might have found congenial. The key is to pay attention to first-person and third-person uses of mental terms and to realize that these uses are mutually interdependent. Specifically, on the one hand, we teach children to replace their non-linguistic expressions of sensations with linguistic expressions in circumstances in which we have ascribed the sensations to them on the basis of their behaviour. On the other hand, in the case of many mental properties, we do not ascribe them to others unless they can apply them to themselves without reference to their behaviour. Importantly, contra many commentators on Wittgenstein, though not all of those contributing to this volume, Child thus attributes to Wittgenstein the non-quietist view that there are philosophical questions to which substantive answers can be given.

Tim Thornton, however, is one of those who emphasize the "therapeutic" side of Wittgenstein and thus the idea that philosophical problems are better dissolved than solved. He thinks, moreover, that Davidson can be understood as agreeing with Wittgenstein, at least when it comes to the question "how mind can impact the world, or the world can impact on the mind", and that together they can address this question in a more satisfactory, and more therapeutic, way than John McDowell, who takes himself to be a follower of Wittgenstein in his therapeutic endeavours. Thornton argues that McDowell's account of the lack of a gap, or the "harmony", between thought and reality "has increasingly taken the shape of a philosophical *theory* of perception of decreasing intuitiveness", not to mention its apparent commitment to idealism. According to Thornton, Wittgenstein's and Davidson's accounts fare much better, stressing, as they both do, the role of language in shaping the mind, and, as Davidson in particular does, the role played by the world in our possession of language and thoughts. Once these roles are given their proper due, the question of contact between mind and world becomes obsolete.

José Zalabardo, too, maintains that Davidson did not think that an explanation of the relation between subjects and the world could be obtained. He reaches this conclusion while considering the early writings of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, and Davidson's last writings, posthumously published as *Truth*

and Predication. Zalabardo's focus is on the problem of predication both in its metaphysical form, "How are particulars related to universals?" and in its semantic form, "How are names or other singular terms related to predicates?" (Davidson 2005, 77). He chastises Davidson for not considering the debates Wittgenstein and Russell were having on this issue in the second decade of the twentieth century, and he proceeds to offer an extensive discussion of these exchanges. He ends with a presentation of Davidson's own solution to the semantic version of the problem of predication. Like most authors in the volume, Zalabardo emphasizes the role played by linguistic use in explaining linguistic meaning. Like many, he does not think that the connection between use and meaning is in conflict with a truth-conditional theory of meaning. The book thus ends by reaffirming one of the main family resemblances between Wittgenstein and Davidson and by reinforcing one of the main family resemblances to be found among its contributors.

On the whole, the volume forcefully displays how engaged with contemporary issues Wittgenstein and Davidson can be understood to be and how fruitfully contemporary philosophers are engaging with them both. I believe that, to a large extent, it also demonstrates that Wittgenstein and Davidson can both be regarded as systematic philosophers, and that constructive philosophical theorizing is compatible with, in Wittgenstein's famous words, "leaving everything as it is" (Wittgenstein 1953, §124).

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