Davidson, Truth and Correspondence

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Abstract: In this essay I will analyze Davidson's proposition of truth as correspondence throughout his work, which will be divided into two periods: one, ranging from his first works until his 1987 "Afterthoughts", the other, going from that date up to his later works. What distinguishes these periods is that during the first, Davidson claimed to be a correspondentist, whilst during the second he recanted this denomination, perceiving it as a terminological mistake. My purpose here is to consider the reason for this so-called mistake and to what extent the issue of correspondence persists in the author's later works. In order to do this, I propose that a distinction be made between two modes of understanding correspondence, which in turn relate to two different ways of understanding philosophical analysis and what Wrihgt calls the traditional debate on truth, as well as the new course it should steer.

I

If we were to make a survey of Davidson´s articles on the problem of truth, from his foundational "Truth and Meaning" (1976) until the year 2000, in which his last work on the matter appeared, we shall glean what appears to be a relinquishment of his initial commitment to truth understood as correspondence. While in "True to the Facts" (1969) and "A Coherence Theory" (1983) an explicit adoption of the correspondentist conception is seen[1], his "Afterthoughts" (1987), coupled to Rorty's critiques[2] to "A Coherence Theory", find him declining to pursue a correspondentist notion of truth[3]. In his 1989 Dewey Lectures[4], he points out that the real objection to correspondence impinges on such theories not putting forth entities to

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[1] "In this work I defend a version of the theory of correspondence. I think that truth can be explained by appealing to a relation between language and the world, and that the analysis of this relationship gives us an idea of how, in expressing sentences, we are sometimes able to discern that which is true. The semantic concept of truth, which Tarski exposed systematically for the first time, plays a key part in this defence. It would be possible to prove that any theory or definition of truth which meets plausible norms will necessarily involve adequate conceptual resources in order to define a sense of correspondence" (Davidson, D., "True to the Facts", in: *Inquiries into Truth & Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 37). "My motto is: correspondence without confrontation. Given a correct epistemology we can be realists in every realm. We can accept that objective truth conditions constitute the keys to meaning while equally accepting a realist conception of the truth, and can insist in claiming knowledge is the knowledge of an objective world that´s independent of our thought or language". (Davidson, D., "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in: LePore, E. (ed.), *Truth and interpretation*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 194).

[2] *Cf.* Rorty, R., "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth", in: *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 126-150.

[3] "As Rorty has noted, based on merely internal evidence my conception cannot be termed a theory of correspondence…Long ago, in 1969 ("True to the Facts"), I argued there is nothing that can be said –in a useful and intelligible fashion— that is corresponded by a sentence; this I repeated in : 'A Coherence Theory on Truth and Knowledge'. I then thought that the fact of having truth characterized as being for a certain tongue or language required for words to be put in relation to objects was enough to give the idea of correspondence something to hold onto; but this now seems to me mistaken. The mistake is, in some way, no more than an inadequate denomination, but terminological inadequacies have a knack for evolving into conceptual confusions, as has happened here". (*Cf.* Davidson, D., "Afterthougts, 1987", in: Malachowski, A.R. (ed.), *Reading Rorty.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 217).

[4] *Cf.* Davidson, D., "The Structure and Content of Truth", in: *The Journal of Philosophy,* 6 (1990).

which the vehicles of truth should correspond[5]. However, it is as early as in "True to the Facts", and even while defending correspondence, that he had acknowledged this, all of which makes it seem that, at the time, he did not think that this objection was sufficient to renounce a correspondentist conception. The substantial change, however, seems to have involved more words that facts[6]. And that Davidson himself believed this was the case seems clear since that time, in 1990, in which he claimed that what he had incurred into, between 1969 and 1983, was a terminological mistake[7]. My aim is to consider the following: what the reason for this terminological mistake may have been, and to what an extent does something like correspondence linger in Davidson's later works?

II

The clue to this may very well reside in how the traditional debate on truth has been presented. If we were to follow Crispin Wright[8], said debate has been characterized by striving for the clarification of the concept of truth by way of concepts that are independent of it, in that they do not presuppose it in any which way. This, we could designate as a *reductive analysis* of the concept of truth. On the other hand, and still following Wright, the different proposals that have been advanced in the frame of this project can be grouped into *four structural proposals*: deflationism, intrisecalism, coherentism and correspondentism [9]. Parts III, IV and V of Wright's article proceed to analyze and criticize the first three of these four proposals; concluding that they all fail to provide a satisfactory analysis of the concept of truth. If Wright's rebuttals are correct, as I believe they are, then the only expeditious path towards a satisfactory portrayal of truth comes

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[5] "The correct objection to correspondence theories is not, thus, that they turn the truth something that humans cannot legitimately aspire to reach; the real objection is these theories fail to provide entities through which the vehicles of truth (whether these be enunciations, statements or preferences) may be said to correspond" (Davidson, D., "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 176).

[6] I develop this hypothesis in "Davidson entre el realismo y el idealismo", in: *Areté*, 2 (1998), pp. 241-266; and *De una teoría del lenguaje a una teoría de la acción intencional: una introducción a la filosofía de Donald Davidson*, León: Factotum, 2001.

[7] *Cf*. note 3.

[8] Wright, Crispin, "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed", in: Blackburn, S. y K. Simmons (ed.), *Truth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 203-232.

[9] Davidson groups these proposals into three sets; the realist, the epistemic and the deflationary, although I think that this different manner of grouping them entails no consequences for that which I aim to develop here. For Davidson´s classification, see "The Structure and Content of Truth", pp. 304-305.

from the ranks of correspondence. The argument takes the form of a disjunctive syllogism:

> Possible proposals on truth are:
> 1. deflationism V intrinsecalism V coherentism V correspondentism
>
> Wrigth´s critiques are such that:
> 2. ¬ deflationism & ¬intrinsecalism & ¬coherentism
>
> Therefore
> correspondentism.

Wright presents it in the following manner: "Hence, it seems to be established that, amongst the four branches of the original tree only that of correspondence, struck, as it were, by an arrow, would be viable—that, against deflationism, our ordinary concept of truth demands that we think of the truth of any given proposition as, to put it one way, a characteristic achievement; and that, against intrinsecalism and coherentism, we cannot not satisfactorily consider this achievement, whether it be as an intrinsic property of a proposition or a feature conferred to it by force of its relation to other propositions. From which it would follow that, even if no satisfactory *analysis* could be given in terms of correspondence, we should still be committed to a correspondentist *conception* of truth –there is no alternative, other than to think of the truth of a proposition as being generally conferred to it through its relation to non-propositional reality"[10].

Davidson reaches a similar conclusion in "Truth Rehabilitated"[11]: "Correspondence, insofar as it is empty as a definition, captures the thought that truth depends on what the world is like, and this alone should be enough to discredit the better part of the epistemic or pragmatic theories"[12].

It is interesting to compare this passage in Davidson with the last sentence of the paragraph quoted from Wright. Both sustain that, even if correspondence cannot provide a satisfactory analysis of the concept of truth, the concept of truth itself cannot be analyzed without it.

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[10] Wright, Crispin, *op.cit,* p. 223.

[11] Davidson, D., "Truth Rehabilitated", in: Brandom, Robert B. (ed.), *Rorty and his Critics*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 65-73.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

It seems clear from these passages that a difference need be established between the uses of word "correspondence", depending on whether we use it to refer to a theory of truth as correspondence, according to which truth is a relation between the bearer and the facts; or if it is perceived as a relational concept between a bearer and a reality that's separate to it. I propose that we use "Correspondence" in referring to the first case, and "correspondence" when referring to the second.

Thus: Truth as Correspondence = Proposal to define the truth as a relation between bearers (beliefs, enunciations, propositions, etc.) and makers of truth (states of affairs, facts etc.). In the spirit of classical analysis, this would imply defining the maker of truth without referring to the use of the concept of truth, and doing the same for the relation between the maker of the truth, and the bearer.

Truth as correspondence = Proposal to portray truth as the property a bearer wields in light of how the world is. Truth is not independent from what the world or reality are. This proposal does not necessarily require that the maker of truth or the referred relations are defined.

If we were to apply Strawson's[13] distinction between reductive[14] and connective analyses, we could say that we use "Correspondence" for the proposal that recurs to the feature of being true depending on how the world is in reductive analysis and "correspondence" when applying this very feature within connective analysis[15].

It becomes clear that someone can reject truth as Correspondence and accept it as correspondence, without incurring any form of contradiction. And I believe this is exactly what happens in Davidson's case. When Davidson defends correspondence, whether in his earlier or later works,

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[13] *Cf.* Strawson, P., *Análisis y metafísica*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1997, chapter 2.

[14] Strawson explains reductive analysis in the following way: "... our task would consist in finding ideas that were completely simple and showing how those simple elements might be assembled –by means of a certain logical or conceptual construction— into the more or less complex ideas that are interesting to philosophers. The purpose would be in achieving a clear comprehension of the complex meanings by reducing them –until there were no remnants left— to simple meanings" (*Cf.* Strawson, P., *Análisis y metafísica*, pp. 61-62. He also characterizes connective analysis with these words: "Let us imagine, instead. the model of an elaborate net, of a system, of connected elements and concepts; a model in which the function of every element, of every concept, could only be appropriately understood from a philosophical vantage, through perceiving its relations with the rest, its place within the system" (*Cf. ibid*, p. 63).

[15] I am indebted to my friend and colleague Ronald Teliz, who, in private conversation, drew my attention to this distinction made by Strawson. He himself makes use of it in his unpublished work "Algunos rasgos relevantes de la noción de verdad y las diferentes áreas de debate realismo/anti-realismo".

what he defends is correspondence (in lowercase letters). When he acknowledges having committed a terminological mistake to Rorty, it's as if he were admitting that he should not have referred to himself as a Correspondentist, but as a correspondentist; but that, for want of this distinction, he should refuse to term himself a correspondentist, insofar as "terminological inadequacies have a knack for evolving into conceptual confusions"[16].

Renouncing the term "correspondence" does not, however, seem too fortunate to me, despite the weight of philosophical tradition[17]. On the one hand, and given the pregnancy of this traditional debate, the renouncement of correspondence could suggest (even when it need not be the case) the adoption of any of the alternative proposals. In fact, if we were to accept 1. of our syllogism, that appears to be the requisite conclusion. Davidson, of course, does not accept 1. and in his case, the refusal to term himself a correspondentist does not entail such consequences. Any reader of Davidson's *ouvre* will be sure to know that he in no way entertains this particular confusion. However, abandoning the term of correspondence leaves those who, like Davidson and many others, think that truth depends on how the world is, without any simple term to which their position might be readily referred. All of which wouldn't be so serious if it weren't for the fact that the affirmation that truth depends on how the world is, is considered a triviality

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16 Davidson, D., "Afterthougts", 1987, p. 154.

17 Not establishing the difference between the uses of the term "correspondence" in the two analytic modalities to which we have referred, or considering the weight of the philosophical tradition when it comes to relating the term to reductive analysis – typical as this is to traditional debate— has led to numerous perplexities and philosophical conundrums. Davidson's attitude in "Afterthougts" is not too different from S. Haack's in "Reflections on Relativism: From Momentous Tautology to Seductive Contradiction", in: *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate,* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998, pp. 149-166. (I embellish on this point in: "Some remarks on Susan Haack's Innocent Realism", in: *The Philosopher Replies to Critics*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press (currently in print)). It would appear to be the case that when philosophers think correspondence plays a fundamental role in truth, they eventually come to abandon the term, which makes it seem as if, their good intentions notwithstanding, they had come to spurn that fundamental role. And it is among these perplexities that we are met, for example, with Strawson's case, who, in his polemic with Austin, affirms that: "Truth theory requires not purification, but elimination" (*Cf.* Austin, J., "Verdad", in: *Ensayos filosófico-lingüísticos*, Madrid: Tecnos, 1983, p. 216); while in his "Reply to Mauricio Beuchot" he sustains that: "'True' is predicated of propositions: to say that a proposition is true is to say something about that proposition. Further yet, to say of an empirical proposition that it is true is to say that things are in reality (or in fact, or in the world) such as anyone asserting (or conjecturing, etc.) said proposition would be in asserting (or conjecturing, etc.) they are. *In this sense I am, and have always been, a theorist of truth as correspondence*" (in: Caorsi, Carlos E. (ed.), *Ensayos sobre Strawson*, Montevideo: Universidad de la República, 1992, p. 28. The italics are mine).

that mostly everyone claims to agree with: even those who opt for other stances in the frame of the traditional debate, which we have proven to be simultaneously impossible. This is because considering that truth depends on how the world is as triteness can be understood in two ways. The first, impinging on its universal acceptance, we shall not discuss, nor does it play any role in clarifying the concept of truth. What matters lies elsewhere, namely, in a manner of belittling the importance of the issue to the point of making it trite, so as not to have it dealt with again. And then, there is the question as to how substantial this is to the concept of truth, so that any characterization that should stray from it should be immediately flawed as a result. This second approach is the serious one to take on the triviality at hand, and it is in this spirit that both Wright and Davidson do so.

III

Let us try to focus on the second question now: ¿how much of correspondence persists in the later works of Davidson? As I have pointed out before[18], I do not think that a significant conceptual shift was suffered in Davidson´s notion of truth between his first and last writings. I think that his work has been correspondentist throughout, and at no point Correspondentist. From his first[19] to his last works[20], Davidson's concern has not been in defining or characterizing truth, but in using it to characterize meaning. And if both in "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth"[21] and "Truth Rehabilitated" he emphasizes truth is such a clear concept that there is no other clearer concept to define it, "Truth and Meaning" already signalled his intention of taking on the concept of truth as primitive and using it to define meaning. It is here that he observes that insofar asTarski used the concept of meaning to define truth; he proposed using the concept of truth to define that of meaning. And one of the achievements that he claims for the Tarskian theory of truth is to have pointed out the links between truth and meaning. Thus, the Davidsonian proposal appears as an alternative to the traditional project; one should not strive to give a definition of truth in simpler terms, which is impossible, but to reveal the bonds this concept has to

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18 *Cf.* note 6.

19 *Cf.* Davidson, D., "Truth and Meaning", in: *Inquiries into Truth & Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

20 *Cf.* Davidson, D., "Truth Rehabilitated", in: Brandom, Robert B. (ed.), *Rorty and his Critics*, pp. 65-73.

21 *Cf.* Davidson, D., "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth", in: *The Journal of Philosophy,* 6 (1996).

meaning and through it, with intensional actions. In his words: "it is one thing to try to define the concept of truth or capture its essence in a juicy catchphrase[22], and another to dwell on its connection to other concepts[23]". If we consider the various characterizations essayed for this, then the merits of the approach become transparent. Correspondence, insofar as it is empty as a definition, captures the thought that truth depends on how the world is...Epistemic and pragmatic theories, on the other hand, have the merit of relating the concept of truth to human endeavours such as language, belief, thought and intensional action, and these are the connections which make truth the key to how the mind apprehends the world"[24].

This is how truth, in Davidson's program, appears as the key to understanding meaning and the apprehension of the world; what interests us, given our initial query, is to what extent truth need be (lowercase) correspondence to perform this part. Let us look into it.

Something Davidson always defended, even at the time when he repented having called himself a correspondentist, is that truth depends on what words mean and how the world is. I think this is the core of what I have termed as correspondence[25]. It could be said that, insofar as this is but a characterization of the truth, it says nothing relevant and falls far from serving as a definition for it. That it is not a definition is, grantedly, indisputable; that it states nothing relevant, is not. What is so relevant about this statement is the link it establishes between truth, meaning and world. Let us see how this link is set by Davidson, and how it implies a correspondentist conception of truth. An accurate portrayal of how the relation between these concepts is established in Davidson's work would demand an exhaustive survey of his theory of radical interpretation, his theory of intensional action and a numerous other questions which I cannot tackle here. I have already done this elsewhere[26], and shall excuse myself from reprising. What I will try to do instead is take up some points I think will be sufficient to back what I intend to show.

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[22] What, in following Strawson, should be termed as reductive analysis.

[23] What, according to Strawson, should be termed as connective analysis.

[24] Davidson, D., "Truth Rehabilitated", in: Brandom, Robert B. (ed.), *Rorty and his Critics*, p. 73.

[25] Lowercase correspondence, that is. From this point onwards, I shall always use the term in this last sense.

[26] *Cf.* Caorsi, Carlos E., *De una teoría del lenguaje a una teoría de la acción intencional: una introducción a la filosofía de Donald Davidson.*

One is the distinction between proximal and distal theories of meaning. According to Davidson's appraisal of them[27], in *proximal theory* statements mean the same if they have the same stimulative meaning, that is, if the same *patterns of stimulation* promote assent and dissent. In *distal theory*, on the other hand, the identity of meaning will depend mainly on the salient causes shared by the speaker and the interpreter, the student and the teacher; meanings are shared there where identical events, objects or situations cause or could cause assent or dissent.

If we were to represent the causal chain leading from events to the beliefs produced by them in the following scheme:

(I) Event → triggers sense nerves, in a certain stimulation pattern → *sense data* → belief

we could say that, for distal theory, the identity of meaning depends on the identity of the event that is featured in the first part of scheme (I), whereas for proximal theory, that identity depends on the identity of the stimulation patters featured in the second half of the schema. But, what effect does this have with respect to our question? The following example by Davidson should allow us to clarify this point: "...let us imagine someone who, when a warthog trots, simply has the stimulation patterns I have when I see a rabbit. Let us suppose that the one-word statement the warthog inspires this person to assent is 'Gavagai!' Led by the stimulative meaning, I shall translate his 'Gavagai' for my 'There's a rabbit', although I see a warthog and no rabbit when he says and believes (according to the proximal theory) that there is a rabbit. The supposition which leads to this conclusion is not absurd: it's just a restructured sensorial"[28].

Let us represent what this passage puts forward by taking scheme (I) as a basis:

(II)   Subject A
Warthog trotting   Stimulative pattern 1   Gavagai 1

Event → triggers sense nerves into a   → *sense data* →   belief
          determined stimulative pattern

Presence of a rabbit   Stimulative pattern 1   Gavagai 2
                                                    Subject B

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27 Davidson, D., "Meaning, Truth and Evidence", in: Barret, Robert B. and Roger F. Gibon (eds.), *Perspectives on Quine,* Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 73.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

In the proximal theory, Gavagai 1 and Gavagai 2 mean the same thing, since the stimulative patterns (Stimulative pattern 1) in both subjects (A and B) are the same.

In the distal theory, Gavagai 1 and Gavagai 2 have a different meaning, because the events provoking assent (the warthog´s trot and the presence of a rabbit) are different.

In the case of proximal theory, if upon sight of the trot of a warthog Subject A says Gavagai, Subject B must attribute him the false belief that he is in the presence of a rabbit, since he would translate his use of Gavagai as: here is a rabbit, given the identity of stimulative patterns between subjects. This is so because meaning and truth are divorced in the proximal theory, whereas in the case of assuming a distal approach, B would attribute A with the true belief that there is a warthog trotting, merely by renouncing to homophonic translation. And this, in turn, is so because, in this instance, truth conditions are determinant of meaning, something which did not occur in the first case. But in order for B to interpret A's utterance as an enunciation of the trot of a warthog, the truth conditions of said utterance should partake of a world shared by A and B, being objective and independent of their beliefs. But if truth conditions are really of this nature, what makes a bearer true or false are events or objects in the world independent of the subject and different from the bearers; so that what we call the nucleus of correspondence is the condition required to provide the explanation given here by Davidson. But let us study how these features are assumed more closely.

IV

In "The Structure and Content of Truth", and in order to explain his erroneous use of the term before "Afterthougts", Davidson writes: "The only legitimate reason I had to term my position as a form of realism was on account of my rejecting positions such as Dummet's antirealism; I was concerned with rejecting the doctrine that reality or truth depended directly on our epistemic capabilities. There is a point to this rejection. But all this rejection is as useless as accepting the slogan that the real and the true are 'independent of our beliefs". The single positive meaning this expression may have, the only use adjusting to the intension of its upholders, draws on the idea of correspondence, and this is a thought without content".

Let us stop at the slogan *the real and the true are independent of our beliefs.* Davidson sustains that is as futile to accept it, as to deny it. The suspension of judgement as relates to this question, does not imply an identical attitude concerning the inversion of that very slogan: *our beliefs are not independent of the real and the true.*

And even as I have no recollection of Davidson having phrased it this way, the acceptance of this seems to follow clearly from two assumptions which are pellucid in their conception of belief. That our beliefs are not independent from the real is followed by the causal relation between beliefs and the world; our beliefs are provoked by events in the world. That they are not independent from truth follows from the veridical nature of belief. Davidson sustains that most of our beliefs are true because that is a part of their nature, and this is a direct result of the way in which beliefs are born as an effect to events taking place in the world and his distal theory of meaning. Said theory involves the homologation of the causes for belief, the conditions of truth and their meaning for its paradigmatic cases. As he writes in "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth": "...what finally joins language to the world are the conditions which typically cause us to sustain that true statements *constitute* truth conditions, hence, the meaning of our statements"[29].

This homologation of cause, truth conditions and meanings lends a clear foundation to the veracity of beliefs. But let us stop at the veridical character of belief. We could say that in the paradigmatic case, that is, in producing what we could call *occasional belief*s, the emergence of belief is an effect of the event that caused it; and, if said event is produced, then the meaning and the truth conditions of belief will be produced with it. Thus, in this paradigmatic case, the presence of the cause ensures the presence of the truth conditions for belief, which is in itself the assurance of its truth. But let us look at this more carefully. As has been said, the events are the causes, the truth conditions and the meaning of beliefs. But when we speak of meaning, do we mean reference or sense? The answer to this question compels us to pause at the Davidsonian notion of event. It is a topic in Davidson's philosophy, both in his theory of action and in his theory of causality and the mind, to establish a difference between events and their descriptions. One same event allows for several descriptions, in different languages and even in one language only. Davidson says: "I press the switch, I turn on the light and I light up the room. Without knowing it, I'm also warning an intruder of my presence in the house. In this case, I did not

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[29] Davidson, D., "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth", p. 275.

have to perform four things but just one, to which four descriptions have been given"[30].

In this case, we have one same event which can be described as pressing the switch, turning the light on, lighting up the room or warning the intruder of my presence in the house. If we compare this distinction between events and the description of events with the distinction between sense and reference, it would seem we should consider events as the references for expressions and descriptions as their senses. We would then have a same referent (an event) allowing for different senses (descriptions of the event). Up to this point, the affinity with Frege is indisputable. At the same time, and given the identification posited by Davidson between event and truth conditions, the latter should serve as referents for the expression, which does not seem that far from Frege, either. We shall now halt at Tarski's Convention (T), which Davidson considers gives the truth conditions of an enunciation:

$$S \text{ is true} \equiv p$$

where "*S*" is a name in the metalanguage of the expression "*p*" and "*p*" is the expression of the language object itself, provided the metalanguage contains the language object, or a translation of the metalanguage to the sentence of the language object named by "S". According to a standard reading that Davidson appropriates, "p" gives "S" its truth conditions. Therefore, "*S*" is true if the event of which "*p*" is a description comes to happen. What seems decisive here for the veracity of "*S*" is the occurrence of the event and not, by any means, the way in which it is described. If this were the case, any other description of the event would serve to provide the truth conditions for "*S*". Let us suppose that "*S*" is the enunciation "I turned on the light", the corresponding enunciation (T) would be:

"I turned on the light" is true $\equiv$ I turned on the light

Now then, the event consisting in my turning on the light, as we have seen, is identical to my warning the intruder of my presence in the house. I could thus write (1) in the following manner:

"I turned on the light" is true $\equiv$ I warned the intruder of my presence in the house.

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[30] Davidson, D., "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", in: *Essays on Actions & Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 4.

Even if this agrees with what we have been saying of the truth conditions for "I turned on the light", it comes across as rather odd and can hardly be made to provide the meaning for "I turned on the light". Where have we gone wrong (provided we have)? It does not seem to help us to consider the right half of (1) as an intensional context, so as to avoid the passage from (1) to (2) because, in that case, the concept of truth would cease to be extensional. It would appear that there is not way for us to escape the substitution in (1) which led to (2). It is a signal Davidsonian contrivance to posit questions as strange as this one and accept them, just to see how far they will take us; let us make use of this conceit and see where all this gets us to. That (2) fails to give us the sense of "I turned on the light" is indisputable and it does not follow that what are considering should be that way. All we should say, then, is that it gives us the reference for that expression. But does it really? If we understand (2) to be giving us the referent for "I turned on the light" in Spanish ("Encendí la luz"), which it certainly does not do, is there any case in which it could? Indeed, there is, in the case that (2) were applied to a particular speaker in a specific place and time: a speaker stating that "I turned on the light" in the circumstances described by Davidson's example[31]. Davidson, however, also claims that: "A theory of truth *does more* than describe an aspect of the verbal conduct of an agent, because not only does it give the truth conditions for the *real* utterances of an agent; it also specifies the conditions under which the uttering of a sentence would be true, if it were uttered"[32].

The use of the subjunctive in this quotation stops us from considering (2) as belonging to a theory of truth for the agent. Because even if (2) gives the truth conditions for a real utterance by the agent, it does not establish the conditions under which this statement could be true, if uttered. And it does not do so because (2) is only valid for that speaker and that situation, we cannot even extrapolate it to the same speaker in a different situation. And the reason why we cannot do so is precisely because events are unique and unrepeatable occurrences. And because, for event $e1$ to allow for both descriptions ("I turned on the light" and "I warned the intruder of my presence in the house"), does not imply that if event $e2$ allows the first description it should just as well allow the second, too. It is hence enough for us to be able to conceive of situations in which turning on the

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[31] This restriction of (T) clauses to a speaker and a time is already featured in "True to the Facts", where the following (T) clause is proposed and modified: "Sentence *s* is true (in Spanish) for speaker *u* in time *t* if and only if *p*."

[32] Davidson, D., "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 310. The italics are mine.

light is not a simultaneous warning to intruders, to disable us from extrapolating (2) for even one same speaker.

It thus seems we are faced with this scenario:

An event = e

Possible descriptions of e = "I turned on the light", "I warned the intruder of my presence in the house".

According to which,

(T) "I turned on the light" is true $\equiv e$

However, there is something disconcerting in this formulation of (T). In our interest to distinguish an event from its descriptions, we recur to "*e*" as a manner of referring to the event without describing it; "*e*" is thus a name for the event, hence, a singular term. But in this case, (T) is misconstrued, for the right side of "$\equiv$" cannot be occupied by a singular term. We are met with the same situation with which Davidson was faced in "Truth and Meaning" for the left side of the biconditional, a situation he braved by assigning a predicate "T" which turned out to be co-extensive to Tarski´s truth predicate. Should we, then, try a similar approach and assign "*e*" a predicate? As well as that might settle the formal aspect of the problem, it is difficult to find an adequate predicate to suit the case at hand. According to this, (T) should be rewritten as something in this line:

(T1) "I turned on the light" is true $\equiv$ Pe,

where "P" is a predicate and "*e*" is its argument. The question is: what predicate is "P"? If we think that if e constitutes the truth conditions for "I turned on the light", then, for this enunciation to be true, it would be necessary for e to happen. We could suppose that "P" means something like "x occurs". In which case we would have:

(T2) "I turned on the light" is true $\equiv e$ occurs.

It seems difficult to understand just what we mean to say by "e ocurrs", however, when e stands for a unique event, with the occurrence of e being the condition for its own referentiality. Perhaps a way to save the question would be by replacing "e ocurrs" with "(Ex) $x=e$", so as to leave us with:

(T3) "I turned on the light" is true $\equiv$ (Ex) $x=e$

So *e* comprises the truth conditions for "I turned on the light", because it allows itself to be described as an event of the sort of turning on the light and not because it allows any other description[33]. It would thus seem we are being led to consider types of events. Insofar as their description depends on language, what kinds of events we have will also depend on language. But for an event to be of a determined sort will not depend on language in the least. It follows that to say that *e* are the truth conditions for "I turned on the light", is to say that *e* is an event of the kind of turning on the light. And so it so seems we must correct our previous statement; the truth conditions for a sentence are not merely events, but events as belonging to a certain sort. We are thus led to rewrite (T3) in the following fashion:

(T4) "I turned on the light" is true ≡ (E*x*) (*x*=*e* & T1*x*)

where "T1*x*" should be read as "*x* is the type of T1", and where the type T1 must in turn be understood as the type of events consisting in having the light turned on.

The resemblance this bears to Austin's[34] theory of truth is undeniable: "An enunciation is said to be true when the historic state of affairs to which it is correlated through demonstrative conventions (that to which 'it refers') is of the sort to which the sentence used is correlated to by descriptive conventions".

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[33] Come this point, we are met with a strong parallel to the Davidsonian theory of action, in which a primary reason justifies an action falling under a certain description, or, in Davidson's own words: "R is a primary reason for the agent to perform *the action A under description d,* only if R consists in a favourable attitude by the agent towards the *actions possessing a certain property*, and in the belief that *A has that property in description d*". (Davidson, D., "Actions, Reasons and Causes", in: *Essays on Actions & Events*, p. 5. The italics are mine).
Just like a reason justifies an action insofar it is described in a certain way, an event establishes the truth conditions for an enunciation insofar as it is described in a certain way. And just as in the case of the explanation of the action we must consider the properties that are possessed by the actions, or which the agent at least considers them as having, when it comes to ascertaining truth conditions, the event must exhibit certain properties, or the speaker should believe it does. This parallel should not surprise us, since in both cases it tries to articulate two levels: an ontological one, concerning causal relations, and a linguistic explanation for them. (On these two levels, see Moya, Carlos, *The Philosophy of Action; An Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
[34] Austin, J., "Verdad", in: *Ensayos filosóficos*, Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1975, p. 123.

Should we infer as a conclusion that Davidson effects a return to the tradition of the debate on truth, given Austin's own position is inscribed in it? We need not go that far, and will just say it appears to us that the features that truth should display to comply with the role which Davidson assigns to it are collected by Austin's definition. But let us leave this comparison aside and return to an aspect of the matter I consider relevant.

As we have seen, *e* constitutes the truth conditions for *S* insofar as it belongs to a determined type. But where have we obtained the type to which *e* must belong to, in order to comprise such conditions? Or, as in the case of our example, by virtue of what have we acknowledged T1 as the sort of events consisting in having the light turned on? The answer is, undoubtedly, in *S.* And this should not come as a surprise to us, since the restrictions for the T Convention concerning "*S*" and "*p*" have the function of

ensuring this, precisely. In other words, that "*S*" is a name for "*p*" if the metalanguage contains the language object, or that "*p*" is a translation of the sentence named by "*S*" to the metalanguage, are a clear expression of this dependency. But even if this should not surprise us, it does not cease to be quite odd for Davidson's aims that the specification of the type that must confer the truth conditions for *S* –which are preconditions for its comprehension—, stem from a previous comprehension of S. And as alarming as this may seem, this is already advanced by Davidson in "Truth and Meaning": "Theory says nothing new about the conditions under which an individual sentence is true, *it does not make those conditions appear more clearly than the sentence itself does*. The task of theory is to relate the known truth conditions of every sentence with those aspects (words) of the sentence which are repeated in other sentences and to which identical roles can be ascribed in other sentences. The empirical power of a theory of this kind will depend on its success in salvaging a structure of a very complex capacity, namely, the capacity to speak and understand a language"[35].

As can be inferred from this quotation, Davidson recognizes that even when "*p*" gives the truth conditions for "*S*", it does not give us those conditions in a clearer way than "*S*" itself does. The acknowledgement of these truth conditions is part of comprehending "*S*". The illusion that the (T) clauses give the truth conditions of an enunciation in a way in which the enunciation itself cannot, stems from considering (T) clauses in which "*p*" is a translation into the metalanguage of the expression of the language object named by "*S*". For example:

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[35] Davidson, D., "Truth and Meaning", in: Davidson, D., *Inquiries into Truth & Interpretation*, p. 25. The italics are mine.

"Snow is white" is true ≡ La nieve es blanca.

For a Spanish speaker, this biconditional will give the truth conditions in a way in which "Snow is White" will not, because it gives them to him in the expression of a language that is not his own and which he would thus not comprehend in terms of it. But the greater clarity that the right side of this biconditional posits for the Spanish-speaker is the result of his previously understanding the truth conditions of "La nieve es blanca", as established by:

"La nieve es blanca" is true ≡ La nieve es blanca.

And in this last case, the right side of the biconditional adds nothing as refers to the truth conditions, regarding what the speaker knows by simply comprehending the expression on the left side.

This should suffice to shed light on the primitive nature that truth has for Davidson. Truth is not just a primitive concept in the sense that there are no more clear means by which to define it; truth is also primitive in that the apprehension of the truth conditions of an enunciation is prior, or in any case simultaneous[36], to the comprehension of its meaning. In this sense, it could be said that there's no need for Davidson to defend Tarski's theory as a theory of correspondence, and maybe this is the reason for considering his emphasis in "True to the Facts" as being wayward. What the Tarskian definition does is give us the structure of truth, the way in which the truth of an enunciation depends on the meaning of its components, and this should be enough for Davidson's objectives. If I were to a direct understanding of the truth conditions to this, I shall have a theory of meaning. Hence, it is not Correspondence[37] that Davidson is so concerned about, but correspondence. The point is not to build a truth theory as correspondent, nor is it relevant that Tarski's theory is of this sort to have it play the role that Davidson assigns to it. The correspondence we are seeking is not, thus, based on theory, but in the primitive and pre-theoretical concept of truth. It follows that the idea of correspondence must be found in the role that truth conditions play in the establishment of meaning. Let us see how these conditions play this part, and to what extent they presuppose correspondence.

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[36] Given the identity he establishes between them.

[37] In the sense of defending that Tarski gave a definition of truth as correspondence in the frames of the traditional debate.

It will help us here to hail back to the situation in which language is used, and the one best geared for this is that of radical interpretation. The speaker utters S in the presence of event e. Let us suppose, for the sake of an argument[38], that we have already determined that e was the cause of the utterance or assent to S on the speaker's behalf. The interpreter now knows that e constitutes the truth conditions of S for the speaker, but he does not know to what type e must belong, to constitute said truth conditions. Since e is an unrepeatable event, the interpreter must work, after that first identification of cause, around types of events, and not with the events themselves. To simplify, let us say that T1 and T2 are the types to which the event e belongs. From that point onwards, the interpreter will have to confront the speaker with events of the types T1 and T2 in order to ascertain before which of the types the speaker upholds the attitude he had towards S in the presence of e. If the interpreter achieves this, he will have established the truth conditions of S for the speaker. Types T1 and T2 are, however, and according to what has been said, the types his language recognizes in the situation. And it's possible that the speaker's language contains different types, so that none of them are co-extensional with T1 and T2. In this case, the interpretation would become more complicated, albeit not impossible. As we have seen, the types form part of the language, but an event's belonging to a type or not is independent of language. The existences of the empty class or improper descriptions are examples of this. Belonging to certain types thus seems distinctive for events, from which it follows that if event e constitutes the truth conditions for S insofar as it belongs to type Tn, Tn must be a type to which e can belong. And Tn must be a type contained by the speaker's language, even if the interpreter's language should not contain it. But even if Tn should not belong to the interpreter's language, it must be recognizable by him in e, as it is recognizable to the community of speakers of the speaker's language. In other words, the series of events $e1$, $e2$,...en, before which the speaker utters S, must exhibit certain common features which make it possible for the speaker to utter S, because if said features failed to exists, the speaker could not have acquired the use of S. And if those common features do exist, the interpreter will end up recognizing them sooner or later if he is to interpret the speaker at all, even if the interpreter's language should not contain a type for it. If truth is to play any kind of part in the attribution of meanings and beliefs to an agent on the behalf of an interpreter, the events must exhibit features –

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[38] Determining this is unto itself problematic, but I'll allow myself this supposition since I wish to detain myself elsewhere in what follows.

available both to the speaker and the interpreter— that can be grouped into types, and these features must be objective in the sense of being independent from the speaker and the interpreter alike. Because it should be noted, among other things, that the absence of a certain type for a determined feature in the interpreter's language does not imply the non-existence of that feature, for in this case there may not be a type for it in the speaker's language.

What remains of correspondence, then? To respond, it will be necessary to enumerate the points to which we have arrived. In doing so, it's likely that I'll end up doing far more metaphysics than Davidson would be willing to accept, but I do not think I will be wrong in asserting that these points spring forth from Davidson's proposal.

1. We have an ontology constituted by events. These events are connected by causal relations and their identity criterion applied is given by the place they hold in the causal net.

2. These events allow for different descriptions. Which descriptions can be made for any one event will depend on two things: a) the language in which said descriptions are performed, and b) the event itself. One same event can be described in different ways, but not in any way.

3. What makes an event allow a certain description must be available both to the speaker and the interpreter, that is to say, it must be publicly available. Furthermore, this public availability must be independent from any language in particular. If there were no features in the event that might be captured previously to the acquisition of a language, language would not only be unlearnable: it would also be impossible.

4. These apprehensible features of the event are what permit the conformation of different types of events.

5. Insofar as events can be classified into types, they can constitute the truth conditions of an enunciation.

6. Access to the truth conditions of enunciations is a necessary condition for building, via the Tarskian theory, a theory of meaning.

7. Tarski's theory articulates meaning from the determination of truth conditions, by providing a method in which truth conditions of an enunciation depend on the meaning of their parts.

8. The conformation of truth conditions depends on the types of events and the types themselves depend on language and events.

9. In this sense, if it is possible to build a theory of meaning on the basis of the truth conditions of the enunciations, these conditions –and

truth itself, with them—, must depend on language and events. And this is a way of making sense of the Davidsonian affirmation that truth depends on what words mean and on how the world is, the correspondentist *quid* we think remains in Davidson's conception.

(Translated from Spanish by Monica Belevan)