

*Causality, Truth, and Reality*¹

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Abstract: The paper tries to analyze critically what is usually taken for granted – the causal relation between empirical knowledge about external world and the world which is (supposedly) known. The aim is neither to propose a new definition of knowledge nor to restate an old one but rather to take a closer look at the claim that knowledge is a true belief caused in a proper way by facts, events, etc. of the external world. This claim is a core of the epistemological approach usually labeled as “causal theory of knowledge”, but there are many causal theories distinct from each other. The paper therefore sketches the causal components of D. Davidson’s epistemology and the roles they play in the process of cognizing, first. Then it exposes more details of Davidson’s approach and pushes some of them further critically.

Keywords: causality, Donald Davidson, externalism, skepticism, knowledge, belief, truth, reality.

Introduction

In the orthodox modern epistemology, knowledge is usually treated as a sort of justified true belief. Some authors omit the justification condition and try to replace it by something better. Their reasons for doing so stem from their sensitiveness to the criticism thrown at the justification condition in the past. The most famous is perhaps

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the criticism by E. Gettier in (1963), but many other abound.² Attempts to modify the definition of knowledge persevere till nowadays. As almost everybody knows in (1969) Quine called for a naturalization of epistemology. Davidson thought that

[b]y this he [Quine] has meant that philosophy should abandon the attempt to provide a foundation for knowledge, or otherwise to justify it, and should instead give an account of how knowledge is acquired.

(2001b, 193)

Quine's requirement is often accompanied by the so called externalization of epistemology. In fact, Davidson's words just cited appear in his essay "Epistemology Externalized" where he defines externalism as the view

that the contents of a person's propositional attitudes are partly determined by factors of which the person may be ignorant. (2001b, 197)

We shall see how these factors are related to causation later, but the relation between naturalization and externalization of epistemology show up already now: a cognizing person is not, and perhaps cannot be, aware of all components and relations that the process of cognizing consists of.

But cannot *other* cognizers have an ample access to all those components and relations? Internalism converges often with justificationism³ begetting thus the trouble how to get in touch with *reality* and *to know* it. There are countless attempts of justificationism to overcome skepticism⁴, but all in vain. Externalism adopts a peculiar

² Justification has been under heavy attack long before Gettier, for example in the work of K. R. Popper (1934) which fires against justificatory role of evidence in empirical sciences.

³ Epistemological internalism claims that S has knowledge iff S knows that he has knowledge. Justificationism claims that if S's belief is to be knowledge it must be in some sense justified.

⁴ We warn of the confusion between agnosticism and skepticism. The former claims that *there is no* knowledge while the latter that *there is* knowledge but cannot be justified in any sense. Skepticism is anti-justificationism.

position by introducing a condition for knowledge more important than the condition of justification. A proper causal relation between knowledge and world is just one candidate from many but it does not matter now.⁵ What matters is how causal relations help to get over the trouble mentioned above, if at all. For, the trouble affects *every* doctrine that describes how knowledge is acquired, including externalism. Davidson was admirably critical about the issue when he wrote:

Emphasis on sensation or perception in matters epistemological springs from the obvious thought: sensations are what connect the world and our beliefs, and they are candidates for justifiers because we often are aware of them. The trouble we have been running into is that the justification seems to depend on the awareness, which is just another belief. (2001b, 142)

The trouble is that

[t]he relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes
(Davidson 2001b, 143).

Before we analyze it a bit more, we shall introduce the known Davidson's claim that 'the relation is causal', i.e. that '[s]ensations cause some beliefs' (ibid.).

1 Causes or Reasons?

At the first sight, the basic proposal of Davidson appears to be that there are two causal chains steering the way from world to knowledge. The first originates in the external world: a physical event (say, the sunrise) gives rise to a process of its sensation, i.e. to a neurophysiological event happening to the body of a perceiving subject S (say, sighting). The second causal chain begins with the sensation happening to the body of S and ends up in a belief of S, i.e. in his mental state of *becoming aware* of something through senses (say, S's seeing that the sun is rising). Davidson defines beliefs as

⁵ A survey of such candidates as well as of the battles between internalism, externalism and skepticism can be found almost in every modern book on epistemology; see, e.g., Hetherington (1996).

'sentences held true by someone who understands them' (2001b, 138). That is the reason why we are prone to talk about two causal chains here. In our trite example, the sunrise caused S's sensation of sunrise and this sensation caused S to form the belief 'Sun is rising'. However, it would make no difference if there is just one chain (see Section 5). What matters is the causal connection of beliefs via sensations with the external world as well as Davidson's conclusion that 'causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified' (2001b, 143).

Now we can proceed to a short but cautious analysis of the conclusion. A. Musgrave urges us to distinguish belief-acts from belief-contents since '[f]orming beliefs or asserting statements are actions that we perform' (2009, 15). He claims that '[r]easons for actions are causes of them, and contents or propositions are not causes' (ibid.). In contrast, the basic proposal of Davidson seems to be that a physical event of the external world causes a neurophysiological event of S's sensation which causes a mental event of S's awareness of the physical event: S's sensation causes S's belief-act *but it is no reason for it*. Causes cannot be reasons.⁶ Musgrave seems to agree with the basic proposal but he refuses the conclusion:

Having an experience with content C often causes a belief with content C. What is caused is not, of course, the content C - contents or propositions have no causes. What is caused is the formation or adoption of a belief with content C. The epistemological question is whether a perceptual cause of a believing is also some kind of reason or justification for that believing ... I ... propose that seeing that P is a (defeasible) reason as well as a cause for believing that. (2009, 16)

We think that Musgrave's proposal postpones the main question. For, it is hard to see how S's having an experience with content C (or S's seeing that P) could *cause* S's formation of a belief with content C (or S's believing that P) if S *must have already been aware of C* (or of P) at the moment when S saw that P. No doubt, Musgrave would answer that

⁶ This result seems to clash with Davidson's (1963) paper where he suggested that some causes featuring in causal explanations of human intentional actions 'are reasons as well' (Davidson 2006, 36). However, our text below shall make clear that the clash is illusive.

'[s]eeing is not always believing' (ibid.), i.e. that although S indeed saw that P, S did not believe that P at that moment. Two troubles arise. First, the would-be answer is doubtful. For, how could S see that P if S has not accepted – however provisionally, tentatively, fallibly or ephemerally – that P as well? Musgrave tries to clarify his answer by the following example:

I can see that there is a flying owl without believing it – perhaps because I am also possessed of the mistaken belief that owls are flightless birds.

(ibid.)

Well, if I really see that *there is* a flying owl I must *accept* that there is a flying owl and, presumably, reject what I believed till now, namely that owls are flightless birds. Of course, I can change my mind in a second and start to believe that what I see *is not* a flying owl *because* owls are flightless birds. Our point is the same in both cases: if S is to see that P, S must *be aware of* P through senses but to be aware of P means *to accept* or *to believe* that P, however 'defeasibly'. There is no 'to see that' without 'to believe that'. An 'experience with content C' is, simply, a belief with content C.

This leads directly to the second trouble. The key question whether sensations can be causes of as well as reasons for belief-acts has been lost due to Musgrave's endowment of sensations with propositional content (cf. his 'experience with content'). Caution is recommended here again. We do not claim that there are 'pure experiences', i.e. uninterpreted mental states or events or acts bearing, nevertheless, perceptual contents or information. For,

if we take perception to consist in a sensation caused by an event in the world (or in the body of the perceiver), the fact of causality cannot be given apart from the sensation, and the sensation cannot serve as evidence unless it causes a belief. But how does one know that the belief was caused by a sensation? Only further beliefs can help. (Davidson 2001b, 164)

All what we claim is that Musgrave moved hastily to the propositional level of experience, hence left the causal relation between non-propositional sensations and belief-acts unnoticed. The unanswered question sounds: 'What is the cause of S's seeing that P and can *this cause* be a reason for S's believing that P as well?' We suppose that Davidson's reply would be: 'Visual sensation (or sighting) is the

cause of seeing or believing that P but it is no reason for that believing because it has no propositional content'. Or as he says:

[The] causal relation cannot be a relation of *confirmation* or *disconfirmation*, since the cause is not a proposition or belief, but just an event in the world or in our sensory apparatus. Nor can such events be considered in themselves to be evidence, unless, of course, they cause us to believe something. And then it is the belief that is properly called the evidence, not the event. (2001b, 173)

What is needed here is an account of causal relations between 'the propositional' and 'the non-propositional' (see Section 4), not of a justificatory mechanism between them. Davidson was right to conclude that there is no such mechanism.⁷

2 Justificationism or Skepticism?

Musgrave's distinction between belief-acts and belief-contents does not help to solve the problems of justification either. He claims that

a thorough and searching critical discussion ... may provide us with the best reason there is for believing (tentatively) that a hypothesis is true - though not, of course, with a conclusive or inconclusive reason for that hypothesis (2007, 183)

and, in the present context, that experiences with contents can be 'reasons, as well as causes, for perceptual belief-acts' (2009, 6), though not for perceptual belief-contents. He considers it feasible because he rejects 'a hidden assumption... that a reason for believing something must also be a reason for what is believed' (ibid.). Hence, we may have a reason for i) *believing* that a belief-content is true while no reason for ii) the truth of its *content*. But is this consistent? What else do we believe in when we make belief-acts of type i) if not in ii), i.e. in the

⁷ Of course, if *we* describe *S*'s sensation as a cause of *S*'s belief, *we* can succeed to provide a causal explanation of *S*'s act of believing but this would not change *S*'s sensations into *S*'s reasons for his belief. For the issue whether *we* gain some good reasons in this way see our text below, esp. Section 5.

contents of what is believed? Indeed, in the light of Davidson's above remark that beliefs are 'sentences held true by someone who understands them' (2001b, 138) it is odd to claim that although S's seeing that P is a reason for S's believing in P it is no reason for what is believed, i.e. for P itself. If S's seeing that P is a reason for his believing that P (i.e. for S's holding P true), and if it is the content (i.e. P) what S holds true, there is a reason for what is believed, i.e. for the truth of P, like it or not. To sum up: reasons for S's belief-acts are reasons for S's believings in belief-contents. The real trouble hidden behind Musgrave's approach is that the putative reasons are either connected with the truth or not. If they are not, they do not deserve to be called reasons. Similarly, abandonment of justification is either complete (skepticism) or none (justificationism), there is no middle way. Musgrave's distinction between belief-acts and belief-contents *together* with his urge that there are good reasons for the former but not for the latter is, in fact, justificationism for show.

We do not intend to explain here why good reasons are neither available in order to justify knowledge,⁸ nor involved in the process of cognizing. Suffice it to say that skepticism, i.e. 'the doctrine that, at least for factual statements, nothing can be known with any positive degree of justification' (Miller 2006, 137), is correct. We are aware of the fact that Davidson criticized what he called 'global skepticism' (2001b, 151) and promoted coherence theory of justification according to which 'all that counts as evidence or justification for a belief must come from the same totality of belief to which it belongs' (2001b, 153). He hoped that coherence theory will 'rescue us from a standard form of skepticism by showing why it is impossible for all our beliefs to be false together' (*ibid.*). Accordingly, Davidson rejected the idea that 'all our best-researched and -established thoughts and theories may be false' (2001b, 140) but retained the idea that 'the independence of belief and truth requires only that *each* of our beliefs may be false' (*ibid.*). In our view this is really to reject a sweeping global doctrine, namely the doctrine that there can be no knowledge at all because all of our beliefs may be false. However, this is the doctrine of *agnosticism*, not of

⁸ The best criticism of justification is, in our view, provided by Miller (1994, Chapter 3).

skepticism (see note 4 above). *Modest skepticism* agrees with Davidson that each of our beliefs may be false and *stops* to look for their justifications. After all, has not *this* been a part of what Quine required from a naturalized epistemology?

Besides, Quine required that epistemology should explain how knowledge is acquired. Causal relations between beliefs and world should therefore be examined according to this requirement. For the plain fact is that skepticism is compatible with the view that there is knowledge as well as absolute truth.

The level-headed sceptic ... does not doubt that there is truth to be had, but thinks that it may be had only by making a lucky guess

(Miller 2006, 150).

Such a skeptical way to knowledge brings many questions, the dearest for contemporary epistemologists perhaps being 'What is then the difference between knowledge and a lucky guess?' As already stated, we aim to propose neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for beliefs to count as knowledge. Most such attempts are flawed by regarding justification or its surrogate as the distinction sign of knowledge. In our opinion, this is to misunderstand Quine's call for naturalization of epistemology. Even Quine misunderstood himself when proposed sensory stimuli as a sort of empirical foundation of knowledge. No surprise that he thus opened 'the door to skepticism' (Davidson 2001b, 144).

So, if causal relations between knowledge and the world are to be examined, we shall deal with the question of causal relations among beliefs, truth and the (external) world *when knowledge is acquired*. The question of causal justification of beliefs, if it makes sense at all, makes no difference. What matters is the truth of our beliefs, not their justification. For, as already Ch. S. Peirce saw, '[t]hat which any true proposition asserts is *real*, in the sense of being as it is regardless of what you or I may think about it' (1955, 265). *S*'s belief that the sun is rising is true iff the sun is rising, not if *S* has (inconclusive)⁹ reasons to be-

⁹ Needless to say, a conclusive justification of any factual statement is impossible to have. Justification is further commented on in Section 5 of this paper.

lieve that the sun is rising. What we should seek, therefore, are the relations of our knowledge to the world, not the illusory justificatory relations of beliefs to beliefs. So what about S's sensations, sightings and the like? Davidson as a coherentist thought that

the distinction between sentences belief in whose truth is justified by sensations and sentences belief in whose truth is justified only by appeal to other sentences held true is as anathema to the coherentist as the distinction between beliefs justified by sensations and beliefs justified only by appeal to further beliefs. Accordingly, I suggest we give up the idea that meaning or knowledge is grounded on something that counts as an ultimate source of evidence. No doubt meaning and knowledge depend on experience, and experience ultimately on sensation. But this is the 'depend' of causality, not of evidence or justification. (2001b, 146)

The question for us, then, is what exactly does causality for knowledge and truth? That it does no justificatory service we already know.

3 Is Knowledge Caused by Reality?

After the preliminaries from Sections 1 and 2 we shall examine the basic proposal that beliefs are causally connected via sensations with the world. A bizarre but crucial question is whether there indeed is such a causal connection. This is no more than to ask two different questions: 1. 'Is the causal condition discussed till now a sufficient condition to acquire knowledge?' 2. 'Is it a necessary condition for cognizing?' Many subsidiary questions emerge but we shall deal with them in due course.

That causal condition is not sufficient for having *knowledge* should be evident. Some causal chains rooted in the external world result in *false beliefs*, but according to orthodox modern epistemology false beliefs are not knowledge. Davidson suggested that basic¹⁰ (if not all) beliefs are acquired in a causal way which has

a form of triangulation: each of two people is reacting differentially to sensory stimuli streaming in from a certain direction. Projecting the incoming

¹⁰ The so-called basic beliefs are in no sense foundational. As 'basic' are treated by Davidson 'our earliest learned and most basic sentences' such as 'Mama', 'Doggie', 'Red', 'Fire', 'Gavagai' (2001b, 200).

lines outward, the common cause is at their intersection. If the two people now note each other's reactions (in the case of language, verbal reactions), each can correlate these observed reactions with his or her stimuli from the world. A common cause has been determined. The triangle which gives content to thought and speech is complete. (2001b, 213)

We do not doubt that this 'triangular nexus of causal relations ... supplies the conditions necessary for the concept of truth to have application' (Davidson 2001b, 83) but claim that the application leads to true *as well as* to false results. That must be so, of course, otherwise the concept of truth would have *no* 'application'. The issue was noticed and answered already by Davidson:

Why couldn't it happen that speaker and interpreter understand one another on the basis of shared but erroneous beliefs? This can, and no doubt often does, happen. But it cannot be the rule. (2001b, 150)¹¹

The same goes for *each* belief acquired via triangulation: *perhaps it is no knowledge*. Here is our slightly modified example from above. The sunrise caused S's sensation of the sunrise and the sensation caused S to form the belief 'Sun is moving'. Since S belongs to the fun club of Ptolemy's geocentric system, his belief draws meaning from S's web of beliefs, say, from all those about how cosmos is arranged. S and his folks tested the belief many times and it survived. They believed that sun is moving, yet the belief was false already at that time.

Caricature aside, some could object that the causal condition (or triangulation) has never been proposed as a sufficient condition for having knowledge *but beliefs*. If S is to know that P (where 'P' stands for 'Sun is moving'), it is certainly not enough if S's belief that P is caused by the sunrise; S's belief that P must be true as well. Nevertheless, the causal chain was sufficient to produce *the belief* that P. That is the objection. What is the answer? Is it really enough *for a belief to emerge* if it is caused by the world via sensations? Recall that beliefs are 'sentences held true by someone who understands them' (Davidson 2001b, 138). That is, beliefs are not sentences as such but *mental*

¹¹ Some comments on the last quoted sentence have been made in Section 2 above in connection with skepticism and agnosticism. For more Davidson's views see e.g. (2001b, Chapter 10).

states of a believer S who holds those sentences true. It could appear therefore that our last question concerns, in Musgrave's terminology, S's belief-acts, not S's belief-contents. But this is fishy. For, as we already know, there is no S's act of believing without a content S believes in.¹² So is it enough for S to believe the belief-content P if S's belief-act is caused by the sunrise? It could be argued that apart from S's sensations caused by the sunrise, S needs to be aware of the notion of truth as well as to have 'dispositions to react differentially to objects and events' (Davidson 2001b, 29), to think, to learn, to understand and to speak language, etc. However, a proponent of externalism can reply that S acquired all these 'abilities' due to *the past* causal relations among S's mind, his perceptions and the 'external' world including other cognizers.

Davidson went this way when he agreed with T. Burge that 'the contents of utterances and thoughts depend on *the causal history* of the individual, particularly in connection with perception' (2001b, 198, italics added). However, he warned us that

although sensation plays a crucial role in the causal process that connects beliefs with the world, it is a mistake to think it plays *an epistemological role in determining the contents* of those beliefs. (2001b, 46, italics added)

If we join Musgrave in insisting that 'contents or propositions have no causes' (2009, 16), a puzzle escalates. We have belief-acts and belief-contents, the former caused by the world via sensations, the latter undetermined. How are they related? Davidson would reply that it is a misconceived puzzle for it is based on 'the dogma that to have a thought is to have an object before the mind' (2001b, 36):

Most of us long ago gave up the idea of perceptions, sense data, the flow of experience, as things 'given' to the mind; we should treat propositional objects in the same way. Of course people have beliefs, wishes, doubts, and so forth; but to allow this is not to suggest that beliefs, wishes, and doubts are *entities* in or before the mind, or that being in such states requires there to be corresponding mental objects. (2001b, 35 – 36)

¹² We shall explain in the next paragraph why this is not to defend the view that to have a belief is to have an object, the belief-content itself (or proposition), before the mind.

As a consequence, there is no mystery of relation between belief-acts and belief-contents. They are related *causally*. Beliefs and other propositional 'attitudes are simply states, and no more require objects before the mind than sticks require numbers in order to have a certain length' (Davidson 2004, 129). That sensations play no epistemological role in acquiring beliefs has already been explained in Sections 1 and 2 above.

4 Is Belief Caused by Reality?

To have a belief is usually understood as to grasp an abstract object (e.g. a proposition), but abstract objects 'have no causal powers, and so cannot act on, or be acted on by our minds, our brains, or us' (Davidson 2001b, 53). We know, however, that 'beliefs and desires have causal powers, and that is why they explain actions' (Davidson 2004, 112). Davidson tried to solve this tension by a radical view that 'the mental is not an ontological but a conceptual category' (2004, 114).¹³ Does it make sense then to claim that each belief-act or propositional attitude requires its content? Davidson thought that it does:

I am not suggesting for a moment that belief sentences, and sentences that attribute the other attitudes, are not relational in nature. What I am suggesting is that the objects to which we relate people in order to describe their attitudes need not in any sense be *psychological* objects, objects to be grasped, known, or entertained by the person whose attitudes are described... Sentences about the attitudes are relational; for *semantic* reasons there must therefore be objects to which to relate those who have attitudes. But having an attitude is not having an entity before the mind.

(2001b, 36)

We still pursue the question whether the causal condition is sufficient for beliefs to emerge. We got rid of the suspicion that belief-contents cannot be caused and reminded of Davidson's idea of triangulation. It was an important thing to do because according to Davidson '[t]he triangle which gives content to thought and speech is complete' (see

¹³ We allude to the famous Davidson's theory of anomalous monism which is, however, not the prime subject of our analysis. For details see e.g. Chapters 5 of Davidson (2006) and of (Davidson 2001b).

above). So, what items are included in that triangle? The world, at least two cognizing persons, their sensations of the world and of each other, and their reactions to sensory stimuli. The second person then

narrows down the relevant cause to the nearest cause common to two agents who are triangulating the cause by jointly observing an object and each other's reactions. The two observers don't share neural firings or incoming photons; the nearest thing they share is the object prompting both to react in ways the other can note. (Davidson 2004, 142 - 143)

However, this is not enough to have a belief, 'since to have the concept of a lion or of anything else is to have a network of interrelated concepts of the right sorts' (Davidson 2004, 143).¹⁴ As soon as such network is there, 'triangulation will tend to pick out the right content for perceptual beliefs' and it 'also creates the space needed for error, not by deciding what is true in any particular case, but by making objectivity dependent on intersubjectivity' (ibid.).

We see that Davidson's idea of triangulation is much more complex than the basic idea of a simple causal chain rooted in the world, running through sensations of a single cognizer and resulting in his knowledge. We stated hastily all those conditions which, according to Davidson, enable knowledge. They bring Davidson's epistemology

in sympathy both with the epistemological view that perceptual knowledge does not require that we know independently that the enabling conditions obtain, and ... with the view ... that the contents of our thoughts and sayings are partly determined by the history of causal interactions with the environment. (Davidson 2001b, 200)

We are aware that these externalist views pose many issues, but let us pursue our case. It seems that we can draw two conclusions: first, the causal condition amended by triangulation is not *sufficient* for having *knowledge* since it leads to true *as well as* false beliefs. However, secondly, nothing prevents us to conclude charitably that it is *sufficient* for acquiring *beliefs*.

Yet, one obstacle remains. As far as we know Davidson did not mention it. It can be the case that

¹⁴ The key role in cognizing plays, according to Davidson, the concept of truth (see his 2001b, Essay 7).

what a person's words mean depends in the most basic cases on the kinds of objects and events that have caused the person to hold the words to be applicable (Davidson 2001b, 37),

but the question is how does it happen that a person 'holds the words to be applicable', and how are they 'applied'? To ask this is nothing more than to ask how beliefs *emerge*. It would definitely be too ambitious to think that philosophy can provide a detailed answer, this is what sciences do. Still, we dare to present a possible problem not only for Davidson's idea of triangulation but for any causal theory of knowledge.

It is known that there are diverse scientific interpretations of quantum indeterminacy. Some hold that 'quantum indeterminacy has no hidden causes', that the real (random) chance in the sense of 'a-causality' is 'a manifestation of the quantum world' (Kováč 2008, Section 1.2)¹⁵, others find such ideas 'unthinkable' and think that chance 'has no rational place among the ultimate constituents of nature' (Stapp 1993, 91). Yet, even those must concede that quantum

jumps are not strictly controlled by any known law of nature. And contemporary quantum theory treats these events as random variables, in the sense that only their statistical weights are specified by the theory: the specific actual choice of whether this event or that event occurs is not fixed by contemporary theory. (Stapp 1993, 216, emphasis suppressed)

As far as we know, the issue of a-causality has not been decided by contemporary science yet. It means that a-causality is still a threat for *all* causal theories of knowledge. For, since 'the quantum indeterminacy contributes to the fluctuations of heat motions of ... DNA molecules' (Kováč 2008, Section 1.2), it presumably contributes to brain processes as well. It follows that even if there are causal chains leading from the world via sensation and triangulation to beliefs, they are not necessary for beliefs to emerge. If a required brain event occurs by *real objective chance*, it will lead to a corresponding belief *a-causally*, in the sense that the belief will not be caused by events of the (external) world. Indeed, it would be short-sighted even to argue that the belief

¹⁵ The paper Kováč (2008) was published in Slovak. We bear full responsibility for the translation of quotations.

has been undoubtedly caused by the brain event. For, according to Davidson's anomalous monism, '[m]ental objects and events are at the same time also physical, physiological, biological, and chemical objects and events' (Davidson 2004, 114). *If* mental beliefs are brain events, and *if* the latter are uncaused, so are the former.

Our last task is to examine whether the causal condition is necessary for *knowledge*. It may seem that the above argument already yielded conclusion, but it did not. It pointed out that, given some assumptions, the causal condition does not have to be necessary for *beliefs* to emerge. Link this with the orthodox view that knowledge is a sort of justified true belief and you shall get the hunch that perhaps there are *true* beliefs about the world which are *not caused by the world*, yet are *true owing to the world*. It would mean that the relation between beliefs and the world, which is crucial and necessary for those beliefs *to become knowledge*, is not the causal relation between the world and mental states of believing, but a relation between the world and *truth* of those beliefs. But what could *this* relation look like?

5 Causation and Truth

Truth is sometimes pictured as an abstract entity while causation as a relation linking solely space-time objects or events. Davidson wrote that he sees 'no harm in holding that truth is a property: some beliefs and utterances have it and some do not' (1999, 15). It follows that truth is not, according to Davidson, an abstract entity. After all, we already know that he abandoned the view that there are abstract mental objects being known or grasped. It seems therefore that truth as a property of (true) beliefs is caused by the world as soon as (true) beliefs are. But is it? The causal condition being discussed brings into existence, if any beliefs at all, then true *as well as* false ones. There are not two causal chains: one reserved for true beliefs, the second for false ones. There is just one causal chain resulting in beliefs, be they true or false. So is there anything 'special' about the causal condition, something what 'works' *only* when true beliefs are acquired, and what has not been recognized yet?

We shall answer this by tackling a seemingly different problem posed by the above option that there are beliefs uncaused by the

world. Can such beliefs be true? Can they be knowledge? Suppose that one morning S wakes up and that a quantum jump occurs in his brain, together with a brain event corresponding to his mental state resulting in the belief that the sun is rising. Since beliefs have causal powers, S goes to the window and watches a charming sunrise. Can we say that S knows, at the moment of the sunrise watching, that sun is rising, in spite of the fact that S's belief has not been caused by that sunrise? Obviously we cannot. It would be weird to claim that the truth of a belief uncaused by the world has been caused by the world. If S's belief had existed *prior* to S's watching, it would make little sense to say that it was caused, together with its property of being true, by S's watching. Tarski (1956) taught us that S's belief that the sun is rising is true iff the sun is rising, not iff S watches the sunrise. Davidson embraced Tarski's objective view of truth and agreed that

the truth of an utterance depends on just two things: what the words as spoken mean, and how the world is arranged. There is no further relativism to a conceptual scheme, a way of viewing things, or a perspective.

(2001b, 139)

If there are true beliefs uncaused by world, their property of being true is uncaused, too.

Since rival scientific theories of mind-brain connections are controversial¹⁶, it is of no surprise that our argument working with the premise that there are beliefs uncaused by the world is controversial as well. However, our point can be made regardless of whether we admit that S can have true beliefs prior to his perceptual contact with the world or not, if we consider the question of the nature of truth. No doubt, truth can be a property of beliefs, but the question is whether it can be caused. It is well-known that Tarski (1956) defined truth by means of a relation of satisfaction. Davidson remarked that 'the property of being true has [thus] been explained, and non-trivially, in terms of a relation between language and something else', namely 'the

¹⁶ Stapp (1993) offers a notable discussion about clashing quantum mechanical views on this issue.

world' (2001a, 48).¹⁷ The point is that truth, in Tarskian account,¹⁸ though a property of beliefs is independent of the way how beliefs emerge. Forgetting the option that there may be uncaused beliefs, we can agree that Davidson tracked the causal way of how we find out (or learn) 'what the words as spoken mean' as well as 'how the world is arranged'. But the way how the world is arranged is (partly) independent of our findings or beliefs. S may *believe* that the sun is rising (or moving) *because* he sees a charming sunrise, and *because* he learnt to use the relevant words in a causal way, but this alone does not make his belief true. If it were so, there would be no space for errors: *all* our attempts to have knowledge would be successful in the end, i.e. resulting in true beliefs. This is to remind Davidson's opinion quoted above that there is an 'independence of belief and truth' (2001b, 140). But what does the independency mean? Simply that

[t]he procedures that allow us to classify statements as true and false are valuable as far as they go, and no one denies that some procedures are needed at the empirical level, but they are criteria of truth only if they perform the classification correctly; that is, truly. It is therefore imperative that we have an understanding of truth [that of Tarski] that is independent of any means we adopt for classifying statements as true. Without such an independent understanding we are doomed to fall into the trap of defining truth in terms of the procedures we use to classify it.

(Miller 2006, 176)

It is rarely appreciated what the gap between truth and belief implies (an exception is Zagzebski 2004). In fact, it is the cause of the so-called Gettier counterexamples, including those originally posed by Gettier (1963). The only way how *not to be* Gettiered is to propose a property of beliefs which closes the gap between beliefs and truth. In our case, the property would be something like 'being caused in a proper way by a proper cause', what does not say much, but it could be specified by the causal theory in question. However, the proponent of such theory would in turn face the problem how beliefs can possess the

¹⁷ The relation of satisfaction is *not* the relation of correspondence. See Davidson (2001a, Essay 3) for details.

¹⁸ We say 'Tarskian' because Tarski did not write about beliefs but sentences. This has no influence on our argument.

avored property. All proposals of this kind are too strong: they project a condition of knowledge which cannot be fulfilled by erring humans. Davidson did not follow this way. He acknowledged many times that causal chains often end up in false beliefs. And although he built causal chains in the processes yielding good reasons for beliefs, the gap between beliefs and truth remained unbridged. Of course, *we can think* we have excellent intersubjective reasons to believe that our belief is true, but we cannot say that *these reasons* are what enable us to know that our belief *is* true. More precisely, *we can even think* that those reasons give us knowledge of truth, but as soon as we do this, we lose to (modest) skepticism. Since we think that skepticism is right, our conclusion is that we can know the truth, but never with good reasons. The only way how to bridge the gap between beliefs and truth is *to conjecture* that beliefs are true.

This is the place where we diverge from Davidson's externalism. We agree that 'knowledge does not require that we know ... that the enabling conditions obtain' (Davidson 2001b, 200), but disagree that knowledge requires justification. From Davidson's point of view justification of a belief is never conclusive, and always a matter of coherence of the belief with other beliefs. In our view such justification is of no use for knowledge. No positive degree of justification of a belief but its certainty tells us that the belief is true. Since certainty of empirical beliefs cannot be obtained, inconclusive justification or so-called good reasons, even if they existed, would be pointless. If someone objects that good reasons are needed for having *justified* beliefs, we would retort that *true* beliefs are what we want. Even if true beliefs about the world are *always* caused by the world, it does not help us in deciding whether our beliefs are knowledge or not. Davidson was right to claim that 'truth is neither radically nonepistemic, nor radically epistemic' (2001b, 189), but he should add that this is to welcome skepticism. Of course, *we know many truths but not due to good reasons*. The crucial connection between knowledge and the world lies *outside* the fictitious realm of good reasons. Those craving for justification could complain that this is a high price externalism has to pay.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, our conclusion is much more optimistic. It comes out that *there is a twofold relation between beliefs (or knowledge or language) and the world (or reality)*: the first relation holds between the world and beliefs and, presumably, brings beliefs into their existence. This is the causal condition being discussed and questioned above. If sciences ever remove our doubts, all the better for causation. The second relation, though of no causal nature, is the relation of (Tarski's) satisfaction, and holds between the world and knowledge. That is, even if our doubts are right, knowledge and the world are still related by virtue of truth. Of course, both relations are valuable as far as they go: the former proposes the way how beliefs are acquired, but does not determine their truth-values. The latter proposes the way how true beliefs relate to the world, i.e. explains what it means if a belief is true, but says nothing about how beliefs emerge. Neither relation reveals how we know that our beliefs are true, but this is not what we expected.

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