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Sociality, Expression, and This Thing called Language

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ABSTRACT *Davidson's well-known language skepticism—the claim that there is no such a thing as a language—has recognizably Gricean underpinnings, some of which also underlie his continuity skepticism—the claim that there can be no philosophically illuminating account of the emergence of language and thought. My first aim in this paper is to highlight aspects of the complicated relationship between central Davidsonian and Gricean ideas concerning language. After a brief review of Davidson's two skeptical claims and their Gricean underpinnings, I provide my own take on how Davidson's continuity skepticism can be resisted consistently with his rejection of the Gricean priority claim, yet without giving up some of Grice's own insights regarding the origins of meaning.*

Davidson's well-known claim that there is no such a thing as a language—what you may call his *language skepticism*—has recognizably Gricean underpinnings. Davidson also appeals to some of the same Gricean ideas about linguistic interpretation that fuel his language skepticism in defending another kind of skepticism—*continuity skepticism*. This is the claim that there can be no philosophically illuminating account of the emergence of language and thought. At the same time, Davidson's defense of his continuity skepticism rests on a complete rejection of what is arguably the most crucial element in Grice's thought about language (one that also defines post-Gricean thought about the emergence of language), namely the conceptual priority of the psychological over the semantic.

My first aim in this paper is to highlight certain aspects of the complicated relationship between some of the central ideas in Davidson and Grice concerning language. However, my aim here is not merely interpretive. After a brief review of Davidson's two skeptical claims and their Gricean underpinnings, I provide my own take on how Davidson's continuity skepticism can be resisted

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consistently with his rejection of the Gricean priority claim, yet without giving up some of Grice's own insights regarding the origins of meaning.

I. Davidson's Language skepticism: 'There Is No Such a Thing as a Language'

In his much-discussed paper, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', Davidson defends the claim that 'there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed'.¹ On the conception Davidson rejects, a *language* is a recursively specified system with a finite vocabulary and set of rules or conventions in use by a linguistic community whose mastery is both necessary and sufficient for interpreting its speakers.² Davidson argues that such a system of shared conventions is *insufficient* for mutual interpretability, by invoking the limitless flexibility of everyday interpretation as illustrated by the familiar phenomenon of malapropism. (If a fellow speaker were to tell us: 'I came across many allegories in my visit to the Everglades', we would understand her to mean *alligators* by 'allegories'. If she later were to say: 'Just got back from another trip to the Everglades, and saw even more alligators than before!', we would have no trouble re-adjusting our interpretation of her.) Davidson also argues that shared conventions are not necessary, by drawing attention to the fact that one can always adopt the stance of the radical interpreter toward a fellow speaker, jettisoning the (natural) default assumption that other speakers share the same linguistic conventions as oneself.³

The defense of language skepticism in 'Nice Derangement' features a number of Gricean themes. To begin with, the skeptical claim Davidson defends is very much in keeping with Grice's own view that 'meaning is [not] essentially

¹Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', 107.

²This is roughly how the conception Davidson rejects is understood in relevant literature. For discussion and references, see LePore and Ludwig, eds., *Donald Davidson*, Ch. 17. (See also Stainton, this volume. Stainton (2) seems to reject the standard characterization.)

³Following Stainton, 'A Deranged Argument Against Public Languages', this volume (Section 2), we can see Davidson's main critical aim as denying that shared conventions have any role to play in the theoretical or philosophical understanding of linguistic communication. For earlier critical discussion of Davidson's claim that there is no such thing as a language, see e.g. Bar-On and Risjord, 'Is There Such a Thing as a Language'; Pietroski, 'A Defense'; and LePore and Ludwig, *Donald Davidson*, 277ff.

connected with the idea of convention'.⁴ Davidson also emphasizes, with Grice, that 'nothing should be allowed to obliterate or even blur the distinction between speaker's meaning and literal meaning'⁵—though he thinks 'we must pry apart what is literal in language from what is conventional or established'.⁶ Furthermore, Davidson characterizes his own notion of literal meaning—what he dubs 'first meaning'—as corresponding '(roughly) to Grices' non-natural meaning'.⁷ The notion of first meaning, he explains, 'applies to words and sentences as uttered by a particular speaker on a particular occasion ... Roughly, first meaning comes first in the order of interpretation'.⁸ And elsewhere he explains that first meaning is determined by 'how [a speaker] *intended to be understood*'⁹; it is what 'comes first in the order of the speaker's or the writer's *semantic intentions*, and it is the necessary basis for all further investigations into what words, as used on an occasion, mean'.¹⁰ Finally, Davidson's answer to the question: how *is* successful linguistic communication possible (in the absence of shared conventions)? is also Gricean. On the view that emerges in 'A Nice Derangement', mature speakers make manifest their intended meanings and their interpreters are able to figure out those meanings based on contextual clues, background knowledge, etc.¹¹ Successful linguistic communication is accomplished by dint of human speakers' ability to engage in a dynamic, and highly flexible, open-ended process of constant mutual adjustments: speakers adjust their linguistic usage to enable hearers to adjust their interpretive theory so as to converge sufficiently with the speakers'. As Davidson explains:

[T]he interpreter uses his theory to understand the speaker; the speaker uses the same (or an equivalent) theory to guide his speech. For the speaker, it is a theory about how the interpreter will interpret him. Obviously, this principle does not demand that speaker and interpreter share

⁴Grice, 'Meaning Revisited', 298. However, while Grice seems to agree with Davidson that shared conventional meanings are not *sufficient* for understanding what speakers say, it's less clear that he would agree that they are in no way *necessary*. For he relies on the idea of conventional meaning (or something close to it) to introduce the notion of implicatures. The Gricean pragmatic derivation of non-literal speaker meanings—to generate conversational implicatures and other non-literal propositional contents—uses as its initial step the literal 'autonomous' meaning of uttered sentences. (The related distinction between what is said and what is implicated is part of his 'wider programme' of which the account of speaker meaning forms only the initial part, and which involves an account of the move from speaker *occasion* meaning to public *timeless* meaning. cf. Avramides, 'Davidson, Grice', 117f.)

⁵Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement', 91.

⁶Ibid.

⁷For more discussion about Davidson's notion of first meaning, see Stainton, 'A Deranged Argument', sec. 3.

⁸Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement', 91.

⁹Davidson, 'The Social Aspect of Language', 12.

¹⁰Davidson, 'Locating Literal Language', 301, emphases added.

¹¹Stainton, 'A Deranged Argument', sec. 3.

the same language. ... What must be shared is the interpreter's and the speaker's understanding of the speaker's words.¹²

But the required convergence can be local and temporary—it's a convergence in what Davidson calls 'passing' (as opposed to 'prior') theory, which is a far cry from the sharing of stable conventions of meaning and use envisaged by those who believe in the existence of 'language'. For,

there are no rules for arriving at [converging] passing theories ... A passing theory really is like a theory at least in this that it is derived by wit, luck, and wisdom from a private vocabulary and grammar, knowledge of the ways people get their point across, and rules of thumb for figuring out what deviations from the dictionary are most likely.¹³

Elsewhere, Davidson insists that the use of language and its interpretation essentially involving agents *following* rules, as opposed to merely acting in accordance with rules.¹⁴ Like other 'language rationalists' (as we may call them),¹⁵ Davidson insists that speaking and interpreting language are *rational* activities. With Grice,¹⁶ he rejects the possibility of non-normative, reductionist accounts of language (and thought). However, Davidson departs from other nonreductionists in denying that the rules that are essential to the use of language must be socially shared. And he explicitly denies that language is essentially social in any sense beyond that required for explaining intersubjective engagement between a speaker and her interpreter (on his account).¹⁷ Though each must be a rule-follower, there's no need for speaker and interpreter to be following the *same* rules in order to achieve successful linguistic communication. And, while it's no doubt true that, practically speaking, conventions play a very useful role in ordinary linguistic communication, theoretically speaking, they are dispensable.¹⁸

II. Origins of Meaning: Grice and Post-Griceans

It might seem that the Davidsonian view of language just summarized is at least compatible with the possibility of explaining the *emergence* of language where there was none before. That is, it might seem that Davidson should be

¹²Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement', 96.

¹³Op. cit., 107.

¹⁴See e.g. Davidson, 'The Emergence of Thought'.

¹⁵Among them one may count Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell, Robert Brandom, Michael Dummett, and Saul Kripke's Wittgenstein, to name a few. For some discussion, see Bar-On and Green, 'Lionspeak'; and Bar-On and Priselac, 'Triangulation and the Beasts'.

¹⁶See Grice, 'Meaning Revisited'.

¹⁷See, e.g. Davidson, 'The Second Person'; and 'The Social Aspect'.

¹⁸Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement', 97f. For more discussion, see Stainton, 'A Deranged Argument'.

at least hospitable to the idea that complex linguistic communication among human speakers as we know it could be seen as something that grew out of patterns of intentional-interpretive communication among nonlinguistic creatures. The reason is this. One obstacle often cited by those who are skeptical about the possibility of explaining the emergence of linguistic communication from the types of communication found among nonlinguistic creatures is the fact that linguistic communication essentially relies on the use of a shared system of arbitrary symbols with meanings that are recursively recombinable according to phonological, syntactic and semantic rules.¹⁹ But then it might seem that the more minimal a theoretical role one assigns to shared conventional meanings in explaining successful linguistic communication the less the absence of these characteristics would constitute a barrier to explaining its emergence. For it might seem that, if linguistic communication requires no essential reliance on pre-existing, shared semantic conventions ('rich, encoded, mandated meanings'), that opens up the possibility that the makings of what is required might already be present, at least in rudimentary form, in animal communication (or at least might have been present in our prelinguistic ancestors). If so, then minimizing the role played by convention in explaining successful linguistic communication might appear to help minimize the chasm between non-linguistic (or prelinguistic) and linguistic communication. As we have seen, Davison assigns no essential role to shared conventions in linguistic communication. Thus, it may seem reasonable to think that his view would be at least compatible with the possibility of explaining the emergence of language.²⁰

Tempting though this line of thought is, it goes against the grain of the Davidsonian 'fabric'. For, as we'll see below, on Davidson's view, what enables linguistic communication to be successful in the absence of shared conventions (both in principle and in practice) are the very abilities we possess that *separate* us from non-linguistic communicators, and which—he argues—*presuppose* linguistic interpretation.

Reflecting on the issue of emergence can serve to highlight an important difference between Davidson and Grice. Grice himself envisages an evolutionary scenario of sorts to explain how non-natural meaning as exemplified paradigmatically in human communication could arise in a world of natural signs.²¹ Grice spins what he labels 'the Myth of X': he imagines a creature, X, who produces *voluntary* behavior—say, a yelp—whose nonvoluntary production

¹⁹For discussion and references, see Richard Moore, in 'Imitation and Conventional Communication'. Moore argues that there are non-Lewisian grounds for thinking that animals may not be able to participate in conventional communication.

²⁰It is telling that proponents of the idea of a 'chasm' often characterize it precisely in terms of the fact that linguistic communication (unlike animal communication) is governed by shared conventions and social norms. For discussion and references, see Bar-On, 'Expressive Communication and Continuity Skepticism'.

²¹Paul Grice, 'Meaning Revisited', 292–7.

would naturally indicate that X is in some state (pain) in order to get his audience, Y, to come to think he's in pain. Grice then envisages several additional stages, each of which adds a layer of complexity to X and Y's communicative interaction in the familiar Gricean way. At the final stage, we have X producing a bit of behavior that is *not* a natural sign of X's state, but is more loosely connected to the message he intends to convey, relying on Y's ability to recognize his intention, in a way that satisfies Grice's conditions on speaker meaning. Following the familiar Gricean trajectory, we could perhaps envisage a series of stages through which a more or less stable repertoire of such communicative vehicles develops and propagates across a given population of speakers, yielding approximations to what we think of as a natural language.²²

The Gricean Myth of X capitalizes on the idea—key to Davidson's attack on *language*—that successful communication does not require that there already be in place a system of conventional signs with meanings shared between speaker and interpreter. Pace language rationalists, who assign an essential role to socially established linguistic rules in explaining the phenomenon of language, Grice—like Davidson—denies that successful communication requires speakers and hearers to be members of a single social group to whose rules or conventions they are both answerable. Grice might very well agree with Davidson²³ that the sociality necessary for successful meaningful communication is of a rather limited nature.

However, Grice's Myth of X epitomizes another key Gricean idea—one that sets Grice sharply apart from *both* language rationalists *and* Davidson. The Myth assumes that, prior to the emergence of language, a nonlinguistic creature X could have—and her audience could discern—very complex ('nested') other-directed intentions. Making manifest such intentions to an audience that is presumed capable of deciphering them is what is supposed to endow utterances with speaker meaning. And crediting creatures with such intentions and their decipherment in no way presupposes that the speaker or hearer already possesses a complex system with semantically recombinable elements. For Grice clearly assumes that individuals can possess psychological states with complex—in effect, recursive—conceptual-propositional contents prior to having a language.

This idea—of *the conceptual priority of the psychological over the semantic*—is in fact definitive of contemporary followers of Grice who seek to provide an account of the origins of language. Unlike Grice's Myth, which was essentially an arm-chair 'just-so' reconstruction, several, more empirically oriented accounts inspired by Grice that are currently on offer explicitly maintain that

²²For discussion of Grice's 'myth of X', see Bar-On, "'Meaning' Revisited: Grice and the Naturalization of Semantics'. For an updated, empirically informed version, see Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*.

²³See e.g. Davidson, 'The Second Person'.

the capacity for ‘mindreading’ is the key evolutionary innovation that had to be in place *before* linguistic communication as we know it could emerge.

Thus, embracing the Relevance Theory expounded in Sperber and Wilson,²⁴ Origgi and Sperber take it that linguistic signs are essentially produced by speakers with the purpose of providing hearers with *evidence* from which their intentions are to be *inferred*; and linguistic ‘[c]omprehension ... crucially involves the recognition by the hearer of a specific ... “speaker’s meaning”’.²⁵ Linguistic communication thus necessarily ‘involves a form of mindreading where, by speaking, the speaker helps the hearer read her mind’.²⁶ This is part of the *overt*ness characteristic of human linguistic communication, which they think is entirely absent from what they describe as *codes* familiar from animal communication. However, Origgi and Sperber advocate a ‘post-Gricean’ view, according to which the relevant ostensive-interpretive processes which shies away from the psychological complexities required by the original Gricean view; specifically—indeinitely ‘nested’ communicative speaker intentions and ‘sophisticated reasoning about the speaker’s mental states’ on the part of hearers.²⁷ Still, the view preserves the idea that linguistic communication is *essentially* ‘ostensive-inferential communication’. The ostensive aspect comprises ‘the informative intention’ speakers have ‘to make it manifest to the hearer that a certain state of affairs is actual or is desirable’, as well as ‘the communicative intention to achieve this informative intention by making it mutually manifest to the hearer and herself that she has this informative intention’.²⁸ Hearers, in turn, must figure out these intentions, on the evidential basis provided by speakers’ utterances and contextual clues, which comprises the *inferential* aspect. By simplifying the character of the requisite intentions and inferences, the post-Gricean account aims to be less psychologically demanding and more realistic than the Gricean account. Nevertheless, it retains the core Gricean idea (see 2.1) that the openness or overtness distinctive of linguistic communication is to be captured *in terms of the deliberate manifestation and inferential attribution of communicative intentions*. When it comes to the evolution of language, Origgi and Sperber suggest that ‘from a relevance theory point of view, the existence of mindreading in our ancestors was a precondition for the emergence and evolution of language’,²⁹ where this ancestral ‘mindreading’ is presumably to be construed in terms of speakers forming fully propositional

²⁴In ‘Relevance Theory’.

²⁵See Origgi and Sperber, ‘Evolution, Communication, and the Proper Function of Language’, 18, and compare Wilson and Sperber, ‘Relevance Theory’, 249.

²⁶Origgi and Sperber, ‘Evolution, Communication ...’, 18.

²⁷Origgi and Sperber, ‘Evolution, Communication ...’, 156. Sperber and Wilson, in ‘Pragmatics, Modularity and Mindreading’, argue for the claim that such processes are handled by a sub-personal *pragmatic module*.

²⁸Origgi and Sperber, ‘Evolution, Communication ...’, 157.

²⁹Origgi and Sperber, ‘Evolution, Communication ...’, 160. And compare Sperber and Origgi, ‘A Pragmatic Perspective on the Evolution of Language’.

communicative intentions and hearers drawing inferences about those intentions.³⁰

Note that Origgi and Sperber are here reasoning from an observation about what is *synchronically* distinctive of all human linguistic exchanges—what they believe sets such exchanges apart from existing forms of animal communication—to a claim about what is necessary for the diachronic *emergence* of meaningful linguistic communication. Even if we refrain from challenging the observation,³¹ the form of reasoning should give us pause. For, in general, we cannot rule out behaviors that do not (yet) exhibit a particular feature as potential *precursors* of an existing behavioral phenomenon that exhibits distinctive—and even unique—features. Suppose it were true that linguistic communication as we now know it indeed fulfils the (post-)Gricean requirements, in virtue of speakers and hearers always engaging in ostensive-inferential communication. It doesn't follow—neither logically nor as a matter of evolutionary theorizing—that when projecting backward, we must suppose our ancestors to have been able to engage in (nonlinguistic) ostensive-inferential communication *before* language could have possibly emerged. For all that the post-Gricean has said, it seems perfectly possible *both* that a 'serious degree of mindreading' is what sets apart meaningful language use from existing animal communication *and* that our ancestors were able to get on their way to linguistic communication as we know it, *without* first becoming proficient mind-readers. (This is what I will later propose.)

So far I have tried to highlight some crucial differences between Davidson's and the Gricean view. Behind their agreement regarding the inessential role of convention and the central role of intention lie some important disagreements. Notably:

- (1) Grice embraces, while Davidson rejects, the conceptual cogency of propositional attitudes independently of and prior to language—indeed, of detailed intentions with recursive structure.
- (2) With that, Grice accepts, while Davidson rejects, the possibility of a certain trajectory to explain how language could *emerge*: from speaker meaning to public language with shared, conventional meanings via a

³⁰Sperber and Wilson, 'Pragmatics, Modularity and Mindreading', and Wilson and Sperber, 'Relevance Theory', consider empirical evidence suggesting that hearers do *not* go through a 'complex discursive reasoning process' to derive meanings in ordinary discourse. But instead of taking it to show that the inferential account is ill-suited for psychological or evolutionary theorizing, they postulate a 'dedicated inferential module' of mind-reading that makes conversational inferences for us (*cf.* Wilson, 'New Directions for Research on Pragmatics and Modularity', 1130f.). In 'Origins of Meaning: Must We "Go Gricean"?', I critically evaluate this view—shared by several prominent theorists of language evolution—concerning the Gricean 'psychological infrastructure' that would have been necessary before human linguistic communication could evolve.

³¹For brief reviews of challenges based on the linguistic abilities of very young children and individuals with certain forms of autism, see Hurford, *Origins of Meaning*, Ch. 9; Wharton, *Pragmatics and Non-verbal Communication*, Ch. 7; and Wilson, 'New Directions'.

process through which speaker meanings propagate and stabilize in a population (à la Lewis and Schiffer).

As we shall see in the next section, Davidson would have no truck with the priority of the psychological over the semantic presupposed by the Gricean and post-Gricean picture. Both Grice's Myth of X and the more empirically oriented post-Gricean evolutionary story require that, prior to the emergence of linguistic systems with symbolic encoded meanings, there could be creatures capable of thoughts, beliefs, and intentions, evidently with full-dress, structured propositional contents. Yet Davidson thinks that there can be no assignment of such contents independently of the interpretation of a speaker's linguistic utterances. In full agreement with language rationalists, he contends that our understanding of contentful psychological states is parasitic on our understanding of the semantic properties of paradigmatically linguistic utterances.³²

III. Davidson's Continuity Skepticism³³

According to a view I've elsewhere dubbed 'continuity skepticism', the minds of nonhuman animals (and possibly even of very young humans) and *our* minds are separated by an unbridgeable gap—a 'Rubicon'—and this undermines the possibility of a *natural history* of human minds (or at least of our ability to tell and make sense of such a history).

Along these lines, Davidson has argued that a key feature of human thought and language, which all animal thought and communication lack, is the *objectivity* of semantic content—its being 'true or false independent (...) of the existence of the thought or the thinker'.³⁴ Such thought requires possession of concepts, whose employment involves *rule-following* (as opposed to merely behaving *in accordance with* rules), which brings in its train the possibility of genuine error.³⁵ And Davidson (like Sellars, Brandom, McDowell, and other

³²For discussion and references, see Bar-On and Green, 'Lionspeak'; and Bar-On and Priselac, 'Triangulation'.

³³The discussion in this section and the next follow closely Bar-On and Priselac, 'Triangulation'; and Bar-On, 'Expressive Communication'.

³⁴Davidson, 'The Emergence of Thought', 130.

³⁵For an earlier articulation of this claim, see Bennett, *Rationality*, 87f.

language rationalists) thinks that the possibility of genuine error requires the rule-follower's *awareness of* that possibility, and thus *having* objective thought requires the thinker to have an awareness or *grasp of objectivity*, something that goes beyond the capacities of nonhuman animals.^{36,37}

In 'The Emergence of Thought', Davidson directly addresses the question of 'the emergence of mental phenomena', and explicitly endorses continuity skepticism:

*There cannot be a sequence of emerging features of the mental, not if those features are to be described in the usual mentalistic vocabulary. Of course ... each stage in the emergence of thought can be described in physical terms. But this will fail as an explanation of the emergence of the mental since we ... cannot expect to find a way of mapping events described in the physical vocabulary onto events described in the mental vocabulary. ... In both the evolution of thought in the history of mankind, and the evolution of thought in an individual, there is a stage at which there is no thought followed by a subsequent stage at which there is thought. To describe the emergence of thought would be to describe the process which leads from the first to the second of these stages. What we lack is a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the intermediate steps.*³⁸

Davidson supports the seemingly questionable move from the last claim, about *lack of vocabulary*, to the claim that there can be no intermediate steps or emergence, by introducing the idea of *triangulation*. This is the idea that contentful thought about an objective world, as well as meaningful linguistic communication, requires 'the existence of a triangle' whose base connects two subjects, S1 and S2, and whose apex is an object in the world, O (121). In defense of his continuity skepticism, Davidson invites us to contrast a 'pure' triangular scenario involving nonhuman animals with the 'reflective' triangular scenarios we are familiar with in our own intersubjective experiences. He

³⁶As he says, 'one cannot believe something, or doubt it, without *knowing* that what one believes or doubts may be either true or false and that one may be wrong' (Davidson, 'The Emergence of Thought', 130). Unless otherwise specified, references below are to this work.

³⁷Robert Brandom and John McDowell agree with Davidson that even perceptual thought, if it is to enjoy objectivity, requires reflective grasp of the contrast between subjective and objective (though Brandom assigns a much more central role than McDowell to the *community* in grounding the relevant norms). See Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 48 and 63; McDowell, *Mind and World*, 114ff. Tyler Burge, in *Origins of Objectivity* (esp. Ch. 2), sharply criticizes this view of objective thought as betraying a thoroughly misguided 'Individualist Representationalism'; Burge proceeds to defend a continuity view on which even arthropods are capable of objective perceptual representations. In Bar-On and Priselac, 'Origins: Subjective, Objective, Intersubjective' (in progress), we evaluate the extent to which Burge's defense of continuity succeeds in engaging Davidson's skepticism.

³⁸Op. cit., 127 (emphases added).

Intersubjective object-directed relations in
'Pure' Triangulation

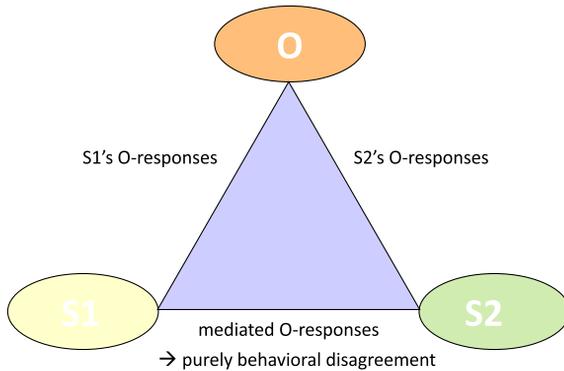


Figure 1. 'Pure' triangulation.

allows that subjects in *pure* triangulation can 'classify' and 'generalize', and form 'habitual inductions', even learned ones, grouping various stimuli together 'by virtue of the similarity of the[ir] responses'.³⁹ He even allows that they can come to associate each other's *responses* to O with O. For example, S1 could respond to S2's O-reaction as S2 responds to O, and vice versa. This makes room for a simultaneous *discrepancy* that is at the heart of objectivity (as Davidson understands it), whereupon 'space is created' for the concept of error to develop⁴⁰ (Figure 1).

But although Davidson thinks that this sort of scenario is *necessary* for providing a conceptual foundation for objective thought and language, he insists that it's *insufficient* for its emergence. This is because nothing in the intersubjective interactions of pure triangulation supports the attribution of *reflective grasp* of the concepts of error, belief, truth, etc. From each subject's point of view, the other subject's behavior is simply something that can be correlated (or not) with items in the world—objects, events, state of affairs—as smoke is correlated with fire, or deer tracks with the recent presence of deer. Any disagreement between them would amount to no more than *behavioral discord*. What is missing in pure triangulation is one subject's treating another *as a subject* who has a *take* on the world, which take can *fit or fail to fit* with the way things are.⁴¹

³⁹Donald Davidson, 'Externalisms', 5.

⁴⁰Davidson, 'Comments on Karlovy Vary papers'.

⁴¹See Davidson, 'The Second Person', 121; see also Davidson, 'Externalisms', 11–6. For a helpful interpretation of this point, see Eilan, 'Joint Attention, Communication, and Mind'.

*Intersubjective object-directed relations in
'Reflective' Triangulation*

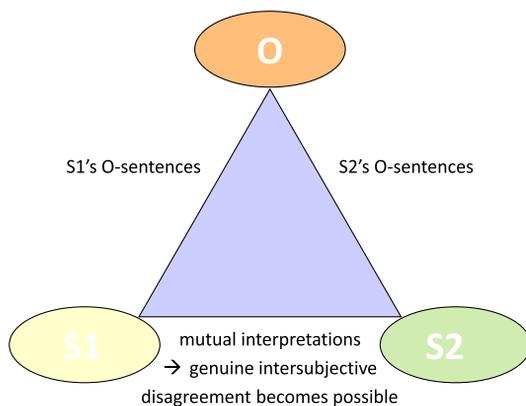


Figure 2. Reflective triangulation.

Indeed, Davidson thinks that *nothing short of linguistic communication* between the two subjects could move us significantly beyond pure triangulation, for '[o]nly when language is in place can creatures appreciate the concept of objective truth ... [and] make use of the triangular situation to form judgments about the world'.⁴² In *reflective* triangulation, we have *language speakers*, capable of responding to objects with meaningful, true or false utterances. On a given occasion, S1 may produce a sentence (say, 'There's a leopard nearby') that S2 presumes S1 to hold-true, and yet which he (S2) takes to be false. Genuine objectivity is provided for via the possibility of each subject

⁴²Davidson, 'The Emergence of Thought', 131. See also Davidson, 'Externalisms', 13; Davidson, *Problems of Rationality*, 140–1. And compare McDowell, *Mind and World*, 114f., where he argues that a perceiver's *grasp* of the difference between subjective and objective is required to render her environment 'more than a succession of problems and opportunities', and to allow both a [subjective] self and an [objective] world to 'be in view'.

recognizing a potential gap between what is *held* to be true (and thus believed) and what *is* the case⁴³ (Figure 2).

And, as Davidson is aware, insisting that reflective triangulation is not only sufficient but also necessary for the emergence of objective thought amounts to giving up on explaining the natural emergence of objective thought and linguistic communication.⁴⁴

IV. Expressive Communication and Origins of Meaning

Thinking in terms of Davidson's sharply contrasting triangles, the difficulty with the Gricean and post-Gricean story concerning the emergence of linguistic communication is that it illicitly presupposes capacities that are only possible in reflective triangulation. The challenge for someone who wants to reject Davidson's continuity skepticism without 'going Gricean' is to provide a characterization of a genuinely *intermediate triangulation* that avoids that difficulty without collapsing into pure triangulation. Elsewhere, I've argued that we can be helped here by considering *expressive behavior* and the distinctive sort of intersubjective communication it affords.

In his seminal work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*,⁴⁵ Darwin identifies expressive behavior as representing an important common ground between 'man and animals'. He had in mind a great variety of displays (vocal, facial, gestural, postural) that animals engage in—including growls, tail-waggings, fear barks and grimaces, lip smacks, ground slaps, food-begging gestures, 'play faces' and play bows, pant hoots, alarm, distress, and food calls, grooming grunts, open-mouth and ear-flap threats, eyebrow flashes, and so on.⁴⁶ Philosophers, linguists, and theorists of animal communication tend to assimilate these sorts of behaviors too closely to mere physiological symptoms, such as red spots on the skin and sneezes, or to nonvoluntary displays that merely convey information about biologically significant features of the

⁴³For more on the role language plays, see especially Davidson, 'The Second Person', 111ff. and 119ff. Unlike Quine, Davidson is not a wholesale skeptic about the legitimate application of the intentional idiom. For him, once mutual linguistic interpretation is in place, there *is* room for genuine rule-following, conceptualization, and the possibility of genuine error and disagreement.

⁴⁴Davidson, 'Externalisms', 13. Davidson's discussion of triangulation makes clear that, like Grice, and in line with language rationalism, he takes linguistic communication—on both the speaker's and the interpreter's part—to be a person-level phenomenon, the province of rational creatures, who are capable of intentional action in the full sense (i.e. behavior motivated by reasons—belief-desire pairs). Thus I suspect that Davidson would reject those post-Gricean construals of intentional-interpretive communication that treat the Gricean aspects of communication as automatic, sub-personal, modular processes (as do, e.g. Wilson and Sperber, 'Pragmatics, Modularity ...').

⁴⁵Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.

⁴⁶For discussion and references, see Bar-On, 'Origins of Meaning', which I follow in this section.

displayer (like a peacock's tail), portraying them simply as *signs* that possess what Grice calls 'natural meaning'.⁴⁷ I have argued that this way of thinking fails to do justice to the richness and complexity of expressive behaviors. Indeed, it can be argued that animal expressive interactions exhibit features that foreshadow significant aspects of human linguistic communication, despite not being underwritten by complex communicative intentions or ingenious insight. Here I can only rehearse some of the key ideas that bear on the continuity skeptic's challenge.

IV.i. Expressing is a form of showing

Think of a small child, Johnny, seeing a friendly dog. His face may light up; or he may let out an excited gasp, pointing at the dog; or he may emit a distinctive sound ('Uh!'), or call out: 'doggy!' as he reaches to pet the dog; or he may exclaim: 'Wanna pet the doggy!' perhaps with no reaching. These are all different ways Johnny has of expressing a particular state of mind. One can *give expression to*—express in the *mental-state* sense—one's amusement at a joke by laughing (where we may assume that laughter does not stand in a semantic representational relation to being amused), as well as by uttering a sentence with a structured meaning, such as 'This is so funny!'. We have here similar expressive performances, but different vehicles of expression.⁴⁸

What is distinctive of expressive performances is that they *show* expressers' states of mind to a suitably endowed audience, as opposed to hiding them, on the one hand, and as opposed to intentionally and articulately *telling* about the

⁴⁷See, for example, Grice, 'Meaning'; Alston, 'Expressing'; and Bennett, *Linguistic Behavior*. But see also, in the animal communication literature, e.g. Maynard-Smith and Harper, *Animal Signals* (esp. Ch. 7); Anderson, *Doctor Dolittle's Delusion* (Ch. 2 and *passim*); Fitch, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 4 and *passim*.

⁴⁸In 'Language as Thought and as Communication', Sellars distinguishes expressing in the semantic sense from expressing in the *causal* and the *action* senses. Bar-On, *Speaking My Mind*, distinguishes between an *act* of expressing and its *product*, on the one hand, and between the *process* and *vehicle* of expressing, and defends a *neo-expressivist* construal, according to which an avowal such as 'I'm so glad to see you!' 'a-expresses' *the speaker's joy* at seeing the addressee, using a vehicle that 's-expresses'; the self-ascriptive *proposition* that the speaker is glad to see her addressee (see esp. Chs. 6–8).

states, on the other.⁴⁹ On the expresser's side, the showing behavior relevant to expressing is behavior that springs immediately from—and directly exhibits, displays, or betrays—the expressed state of mind, as opposed to simply providing information or giving evidence about it (the way, e.g. someone taking an aspirin shows *that* they are in some kind of pain). On the audience's side, the relevant contrast is between behavior that allows some kind of *direct recognition* of the expressed state, on the one hand, and behavior that requires say, inference (however secure) based on various features of the behavior coupled with contextual information and background knowledge.⁵⁰

IV.ii. Nonverbal Expressive Behavior Shows the Presence and Character of Animals' States of Mind

Now, unlike English sentences used in expressing one's states of mind, animals' facial and bodily expressions, their calls and other affective displays, are not expressive vehicles that bear a conventional relation to the states of mind the animals express. And they are not designed to *represent* those states. At the same time, naturally expressive behavior can *directly reveal* various aspects of expressed states of mind—their quality, degree, and intentional objects. A

⁴⁹The showing involved is not that of a mathematical or logical proof or observational evidence; it's not showing *that* something is the case. It's also not like the modeling involved in various kinds of maps. When confronted with an animal baring its teeth in anger, a child smiling in pleasure, a man raising an eyebrow, we may take ourselves to be *witnessing* how things are with the expresser. We often speak of *seeing* someone's anger, *hearing* the nervousness in someone's uneven voice and *feeling* the tension in someone's body, and so on. At least some expressive behavior *makes perceptible*, or enables direct recognition of, the expressed states by observers who are suitably attuned (whether by nature or experience). For relevant discussion, see Green *Self-Expression* (critically discussed in Bar-On, 'Showing What's Within'), and Bar-On and Priselac, 'Emotions and Their Expressions'. (Note: of course, on a given occasion, an animal can bare its teeth without being angry, for any number of reasons, not necessarily through trying to deceive; in which case one could not perceive the anger by perceiving the teeth-baring. Showing and seeing are both *factive*. But that doesn't tell against the animal's anger being perceptible through its behavior. For a partial analogy consider: we can see a tree by seeing, e.g. one of its branches, even though on occasion (say, if the branch were severed), we might be seeing the branch without seeing the tree. If the tree *is* there, attached to the branch, we can see it by seeing its branch. Similarly, if our animal *is* angry, we can perceive its anger by perceiving its angry face and demeanor. For discussion, see Bar-On, *Speaking My Mind*, Ch. 8.)

⁵⁰A related distinction is drawn by ethologists and biologists when they describe animals' 'affective displays' as 'merely expressive', meaning that they are directly tied to, and directly manifest animals' affective states. Such displays are contrasted with *intentionally produced* behaviors that are designed to provide an audience with information about the producer or her environment.

natural expression can display the location of a pain in the chest, as well as its severity, rage, as opposed to panic, at a specific attacker, extreme or mild curiosity at a doll disappearing behind a screen, and so on.⁵¹ A dog's cowering demeanor upon encountering another, or a vervet monkey's alarm call, will show to a suitably endowed recipient the kind of state the animal is in, the state's quality or degree (e.g. *how* afraid it is), the state's intentional object (of *whom* it's afraid, and even how close by the predator is), and the state's dispositional 'profile' (i.e. how the animal is disposed to act).⁵² These sorts of expressive performances are Janus-faced: they point *inward*—to the animal's expressed state of agitation, fear, anger, etc.—at the same time as they point *outward*—toward the object or event at which the state is directed. And they often reveal the relevant behavior's cause or motivation at the same time as they foretell the expresser's impending behavior and move others to respond appropriately.⁵³

Expressive communication is different from—and much less ubiquitous than—animal signals that are designed to convey information about the producer's identity, and various biologically significant attributes (such as readiness to mate, or fitness). Inasmuch as expressive performances are keyed to objects and features of an animal's environment *as apprehended* (or 'psychologically filtered', if you will) by the animal, they contrast with automatic physiological reactions and hormonally triggered behavioral changes, and may be said to exhibit a measure of *intentionality* or subjective directedness, even if not produced intentionally. And in contrast with perceptual and other, more passive states, which are also often said to exhibit intentionality, expressive communication also has an active dimension. A creature giving behavioral expression to a present state of mind—e.g. a dog bowing playfully—shows designated receivers how he is disposed to act, as well as how *they* should act or *what to do*.

⁵¹Note: not all perception-enabling showing is expression. Suppose I point to my child's beaming smile so you can see how much she's enjoying herself. Though my gesture allows you to see a state of mind of my child—her pleasure—I haven't expressed the child's pleasure; *she* has (through *her* smile). Or suppose I roll up my sleeve to expose a sunburn on my arm, or I hand you a stethoscope so you can hear my heart-murmur. Here I do things that enable you to perceive conditions *I* am in. But I haven't *expressed* those conditions. In these cases, though, the behavior that allegedly enables perception of the relevant state is in no way typical or characteristic of *being* in that state. My (or anyone's) *pointing* to my child (or anyone's) smile is in no way part of what *in general* enables the perception of an individual's pleasure. (And, obviously, such 'third-party' pointing isn't part of anyone's *feeling* pleasure, unlike smiling, which is arguably a characteristic component of feeling pleasure.) Similarly, even if my rolling up my sleeve is what enables you in a particular instance to see my sunburn, my (or anyone's) rolling up a sleeve to expose the sunburn is in no way required *in general* for the perception of sunburns; indeed, in this case, *no* behavior is required. (There's a completely 'external' relation between the behavior that enables you to perceive the state and the state shown.)

⁵²For discussion of play bows, see Miklosi, Topál, and Csánvi, 'Comparative Social Cognition: What Can Dogs Teach Us?'

⁵³For an early occurrence of the idea that expressive behavior shows what's within while pointing to what's without, see Torney, *The Concept of Expression*, 27f. and *passim*.

Moreover, unlike rote, automatic, instinctive, or reflexive behaviors, expressive behaviors of a wide range of animal species can be brought under voluntary control, intensified or toned down.⁵⁴ Such control prefigures the sorts of intentional production of which humans are capable.

Expressive signals inherit their complexity from the complexity of the expressed psychological states. But note that to say that a psychological state exhibits complexity along several dimensions is *not* to say that it has recombinable *parts* or components that correspond to the dimensions or aspects of complexity.⁵⁵ The relevant psychological states could be understood as *non-propositional* affective and action-guiding states that are *directed at* (or are ‘about’) certain environmental objects: fear *of* *x*, anger/excitement *at* *y*, attending *to* *z*. Moreover, these *prepositional* attitudes—as I call them—can be usefully thought as prefiguring the propositional attitudes.⁵⁶ And, importantly, to the extent that expressive signals transparently reveal aspects of the complex states they express, their use in communication can be seen as foreshadowing the use of *articulate, linguistic* vehicles, despite the fact that they, like the states they are used to express, lack *composite structure*.

IV.iii. Animals’ Expressive Behavior as Communicative, Overt, and Social

Continuity skeptics often mention animals’ expressive behaviors only to dismiss them as candidate forerunners of the symbolic utterances used in linguistic communication.⁵⁷ Yet I argue that, properly understood, expressive communication can be seen to possess significant features that foreshadow certain psychological, semantic and pragmatic aspects of linguistic communication. Animals’ expressive communication can be usefully thought of as a form

⁵⁴There is considerable experimental evidence that the production of alarm and other calls, as well as other expressively communicative gestures, can be brought under control in all primates, many mammals, and even birds; there is also evidence of various flexible ‘audience effects’ in the production of calls in a number of species. Fitch, *Op. cit.*, 4.9.3; Snowdon, ‘Contextually Flexible Communication in Nonhuman Primates’; for discussion and additional references, see Bar-On, ‘Origins of Meaning’, sec. 4.

⁵⁵As Sellars helpfully observes, a single state, which may *not* have any distinct parts or components corresponding to referential or predicative parts of speech, may nevertheless have both a predicative and a characterizing function by virtue of its multiple *aspects* rather than its distinct *parts*. To illustrate, suppose ‘a’ refers to a, ‘b’ to b, italicization represents something as red, bold font represents something as blue and one symbol being to the left of the other represents its being larger than the other. On Sellars’s suggestion, the complex symbol ‘ab’ shares the *propositional* but not the *logical* (compositional) form of the sentence ‘Red *a* is larger than blue *b*’. See Rosenberg, *Wilfrid Sellars: Fusing the Images*, 105ff.

⁵⁶Tormey, *Op. cit.*, 10f. Tormey speaks (somewhat misleadingly) of the ‘prepositional *object*’ of, e.g. being fascinated by centaurs as designating the state’s intentional object.

⁵⁷See e.g. John McDowell, ‘Meaning, Communication, and Knowledge’; Bennett, *Linguistic Behavior*, §62; Davidson, ‘The Emergence of Thought’, 129. And see also e.g. Anderson, *Doctor Dolittle’s Delusion*, Chs. 2 and 7, and *passim*; Hurford, *Origins of Meaning*, Ch. 6 and *passim*; and Fitch, *The Evolution of Language*, Chs. 4 and 13).

of *world-directed, overt, and social* communicative behavior that is designed by *nature* (as opposed to being designed through individual intention or culture) to show the presence and character of expressers' states of mind to suitably endowed observers, so as to move them to act in appropriate ways (toward the expresser or the object of her expressed state), in part by foretelling the expresser's impending behavior. If I am right, expressive communicative interactions go beyond the merely discriminative, responsive behaviors of pure triangulation, yet understanding them does not require crediting the relevant subjects with language-like propositional thought.

Elsewhere, I have argued that expressive signals carry complex *social meaning* despite lacking compositional structure. As *vehicles*, expressive signals enjoy stable significance and specific function; they can be seen as embodying *shared natural conventions*. Thus consider, e.g. alarm calls. They are shared inasmuch there is relative uniformity in the pattern of their production and uptake across the relevant species or group. But they are, at least in one sense, also arbitrary; there is, for example, no iconic relation between a leopard alarm call and leopards. (And in some cases, the same vocalization can have different semantic significances in different groups belonging to the same species.⁵⁸) Yet alarm calls (and other expressive signals) are generally thought to be innate, rather than learned, so in that sense they are *natural* signs. But, unlike paradigmatic natural signs, expressive signals are, by natural design, produced *for* designated receivers. They have distinct communicative significance.

Moreover, expressive *performances* are 'psychologically involved': they reflect and affect producers' and recipients' current psychological states (even though they are not intentionally produced). Unlike mere 'informative displays' (such as a peacock's spreading its tail, or a frog's sporting bright colors), expressive performances can be brought under considerable voluntary control and be modulated; they can be produced relatively flexibly, contextually modified, and exhibit variability across individuals and groups (despite having, by design, relatively stable significance, as noted above). It is this combination of stability in the social meaning of expressive signals (understood as vehicles) and the potential flexibility in their use that, I argue, renders expressive behaviors, and the kind of communication they afford, plausible natural precursors to linguistic communication.⁵⁹

Going back to Davidson's triangles, expressive communication understood along the above lines can allow us to make sense of what we may call 'intermediate triangulation', interposed between Davidson's pure and reflective triangulations—between the pure case in which S2 simply responds or fails to respond to S1's O-behavior with her own O-behavior, on the one hand, and the reflective case in which S2 *judges that* S1's O-behavior is incorrect

⁵⁸See Schlenker et al., 'Monkey Semantics ...'.

⁵⁹See Bar-On and Green, 'Lionspeak'; Bar-On and Priselac, 'Triangulation'; Bar-On, 'Origins of Meaning'; and Bar-On; 'Expressive Communication'. See also Bar-On (in progress).

intersubjective object-directed relations in
 ‘Intermediate’ Triangulation

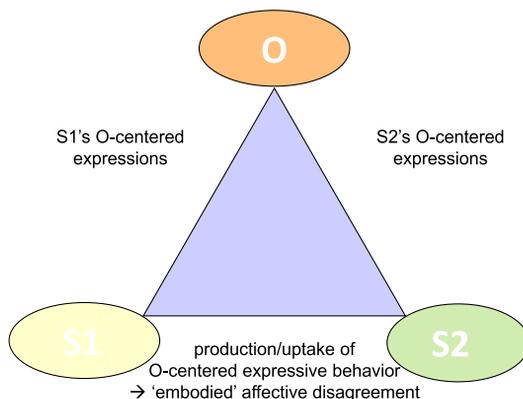


Figure 3. ‘Intermediate’ triangulation.

(specifically, that S1 has uttered a false sentence, betraying a false belief), on the other hand. Very briefly, in intermediate triangulation S1 engages in some expressive behavior—say an alarm call—that is naturally designed to show conspecifics, S2 included, his imminent flight from some specific type of nearby threat (some predator O), so as to move S2 to do the same.⁶⁰ Having observed the behavior, S2 is in a position to respond to it in some way that is not merely responsive to the presence of O (as indicated by the behavior) but is also anticipatory of S1’s subsequent behavior. Instead of also fleeing, for example, S2 may, upon hearing the alarm call and spying no predator, respond to S1’s alarm call by, say, moving toward S1 to consume S1’s soon-to-be-abandoned meal; her behavior can thereby be said to *embody* O-related disagreement with S1’s behavior. The right space seems to be open for crediting S2 with *treating S1 as having his own take* on the situation. For S2’s responsive behavior is one that takes account of what amounts to S1’s getting things wrong (from S2’s perspective) (Figure 3).

The envisaged disagreement between S1 and S2 does not presuppose reflective grasp of objectivity or even possession of propositional thought on the part of the relevant subjects. So it is clearly different from the thick, reflective case. But it is also different from the pure case. For S2 is not simply treating S1’s behavior as a natural sign for the presence of O. Faced with S1’s expressive performance, S2 anticipates not only O’s presence, but *also* the behavior on

⁶⁰We need not attribute to S1 and S2 the *concept* PREDATOR, but only whatever discriminatory dispositions vis-à-vis O that Davidson allows subjects to have in pure triangulation. See again, e.g. Davidson, ‘Externalisms’, 12–3; ‘The Second Person’, 117ff.

S1's part that the performance foretells. Moreover, proper uptake of S1's expressive behavior requires a certain O-related reaction on S2's part (a reaction from which S2's actual behavior departs). This interlocking of O-centered intersubjective interactions makes room for a broader range of intersubjective mismatches/disagreements than Davidson allows in the pure case.

If, unlike Davidson, and like Grice, we do not turn our backs on the question of origins of meaning, and if unlike Grice, but like Davidson, we are suspicious of the idea of psychological states with propositional-recursive contents that precede language, we should be motivated to seek a story that explains the emergence of meaningful language without relying on prior possession of a capacity for sophisticated mindreading. I have suggested that attending to expressive behavior, and the kind of world-directed, overt communication it affords, can help us with that task, thereby allowing us to reject Davidson's continuity skepticism. But where does this leave us with respect to Davidson's *language* skepticism?

It might seem that the way I have argued against Davidson's continuity skepticism is in certain respects friendly to the language skepticism he adopts in 'Nice Derangement'. For on the face of it, the possibility of nonlinguistic expressive communication that foreshadows linguistic communication supports the idea that intersubjective communication of considerable complexity can take place prior to conventional language, thereby lending credence to Davidson's skepticism about the essential role of convention in the kind of communication distinctive of us human beings. Moreover, to the extent that the intermediary triangulation I envisaged made no appeal to elaborate intellectual and mindreading abilities as *preceding* the emergence of language, the picture I have sketched seems in keeping with Davidson's admonitions against the priority assigned by the Gricean and post-Gricean picture of the psychological over the semantic. However, for several reasons, I think the appearance of consilience here is ultimately misleading.

(1) Crucial to Davidson's *language* skepticism is the idea that the social aspect of language is exhausted by intersubjective engagements that involve a speaker who has a language and a 'second person' who interprets her. On Davidson's view, this may suffice for successful communication between two rational agents each of whom *already* possesses a language—even if not a language that the two of them share—both of whom capable of sophisticated mindreading. But we have seen that Davidson does *not* think this possibility can allow us to make sense of the *emergence* of language (or objective thought) where there was none before. My suggestion, on the contrary, was that attending to the genuinely social character of expressive communication among non-linguistic creatures can provide a way of understanding how language could emerge even in the absence of a prior existence of sophisticated metarepresentational thought.

What could explain this possibility, I've suggested, is the fact that some creatures not capable of such thought—plausibly, our prehuman ancestors—are

nevertheless in possession of group-wide shared repertoires of expressive signals designed by nature to convey world-directed states of mind to suitable others. Proper understanding of expressive communication, I believe, could allow us to see expressive repertoires as the scaffolding on which our ancestors might have built a common communicative system governed by socially shared ‘natural conventions’ (as I have described them). (Such a system would qualify as a so-called *protolanguage*: a communicative system whose elements possess stable, encoded meanings and standard uses, even if no recognizably syntactic structure.⁶¹) If so, then expressive communication could be just the ladder that would allow non-linguistic creatures to cross the Language Rubicon without first crossing the mindreading psychological Rubicon. But this picture clearly gives socially shared conventions (if only ‘natural’ ones) a pivotal role to play in explaining the emergence of language—a role that seems to go beyond what Davidson (as well as the post-Griceans) would want to allow.

(2) Relatedly, on my picture, the communicative-interpretive capacities manifested in Davidson’s reflective triangulation are continuous with, and could have grown out of, the communicative capacities of non-linguistic but genuinely social creatures; these were the capacities I appealed to in describing intermediary triangulation. But, ultimately, the possibility of a genuine intermediary that precedes reflective mutual interpretation goes against the grain of Davidson’s view in ‘Nice Derangement’. Both Davidson’s *language* skepticism and his continuity skepticism are underwritten by the same conception of what is essential to linguistic communication—a conception that, at a suitably abstract level, Davidson shares with both Griceans and language rationalists. On this conception, successful communication of the sort we humans engage in essentially involves the intentional and overt production by a speaker of utterances that she can rationally expect her hearer to interpret as intended, using contextually grounded evidence. This reflective-interpretive conception is the cornerstone of Davidson’s arguments for *both* his skeptical claims. However, if my considerations concerning expressive communication are right, we can legitimately dispute the necessity of *reflective* mutual interpretation for minded intersubjective understanding.

(3) My considerations were designed to show that such understanding—with which our predecessors could be plausibly credited—could put creatures ‘on their way’ to language and thought, thus vitiating Davidsonian continuity skepticism. In contrast with the standard Gricean and post-Gricean view, my conception of emergence allows that the capacities required for the kind of sophisticated contextual mindreading presupposed by everyday Gricean-Davidsonian interpretation could not precede the emergence of a natural language. However, the considerations do not support the idea that *there is no* language ‘as philosophers, psychologists, and linguists’ conceive of it. Indeed, the considerations have been put forward with an eye to making plausible the

⁶¹See, e.g. Bickerton, *Language and Species*, Ch. 5.

possibility of an emerging system of arbitrary, combinatorial, rule-governed, learned, and community-wide shared symbols—a language ordinarily so understood.

(4) Finally, some post-Griceans find support in Davidson’s ‘Nice Derangement’ for a certain view of language, known as *radical pragmatics*. This is the view that language users exploit rather minimal systems of mandated, encoded meanings, so that most of the work of linguistic communication is carried out through ostensive-inferential pragmatic processes. (I myself find the co-opting of Davidson’s ideas to support radical pragmatics somewhat suspicious, given that Davidson’s conception of *individual* languages—idiolects—has always remained thoroughly truth-conditional; but discussing this issue goes beyond my scope here.) As far as I can see, there is nothing in the considerations I have here offered to lend credence to a radically pragmatic view of language. It is compatible with my considerations to maintain that mastery of a natural language requires (*inter alia*) acquiring a system with very rich, structured, and shared meanings, and that speakers crucially exploit this system when communicating in creative, novel, and contextually sophisticated ways of the sort that Davidson and the Griceans highlight.

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