Agency, Thought, and Language: Analytic Philosophy Goes to School

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Abstract I take as my starting point recent concerns from within educational psychology about the need to treat the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of empirical research in the field more seriously, specifically in the context of work on the self, mind and agency. Developing this theme, I find such conceptual support in the writings of P. F. Strawson and Donald Davidson, two giants of analytic philosophy in the second half of the Twentieth Century. Drawing particularly on Davidson's later work, in which he seeks to integrate key claims about subjectivity, objectivity, belief, truth and knowledge, within what he refers to as a triangular framework of two speakers and a common world, I find support for pedagogic and classroom organizational structures based on collaborative thinking and dialogue. While Davidson did not write about education, I argue that his framework has much to offer, most particularly in view of the priority it affords language and dialogue as the necessary and sufficient conditions for reason, belief and thought—in short, for being a person in the world.

Introduction: The Challenges of Individualism and Psychologism

In this paper, I revisit some familiar issues about self, agency, thought and language, in the context of teaching and learning. My attention has been drawn to the recent work of Jack Martin and his colleagues, which is critical of the approach typically taken by writers in their own field (Martin and McLellan 2008; also Martin et al. 2003). The field in question is educational psychology, the approach is, broadly speaking, empirical, and the criticism—all the more trenchant coming from fellow psychologists—is that key conceptual issues are either taken for granted or assumed to emerge from the very empirical inquiry that makes use of these concepts in the first place. The key concept discussed by Martin

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and McLellan is that of *self-regulation* and the aspects of the self which are their specific targets are *Individualism* and *Psychologism*.[1]

I agree with Martin and McLellan about the damage wrought by the casual acceptance of Individualism and Psychologism in much of the psychological literature; and their insistence that, by and large, key conceptual issues should not be taken for granted, nor regarded as resolvable within the empirical frameworks whose existence presupposes the coherence of the concepts in question. However, I am not convinced that they "practice what they preach" when it comes to their dismissal of Individualism and Psychologism, for their own arguments appeal to empirical and developmental, rather than conceptual, considerations. For example, they accuse writers on self-regulation of routinely ignoring the broader socio-cultural and historical contexts in which individual persons operate *in fact*, and base their own rejection of Individualism on the dangers it represents, not just for "civic participation", but for "self-sufficiency".[2] We are left hungering for a more conceptually compelling line of argument here, one that demonstrates that the very idea of the self, *qua* individual which functions as both the subject and object of regulation, is incoherent outside the context of its interactions with other selves.

In rejecting Psychologism Martin and McLellan again appeal to the view of "developmental theorists" that "the sources of consciousness, meaning, mind, and selfhood lie in interactivity with others…."; but here they also gesture at a more conceptual imperative, namely, that a wholly internal or mentalist framework would be unable to account for the possibility of *error* in the way we represent things to ourselves. They continue: "Such an inability would make a mystery of our readily observable ability to achieve progressive refinements in our actions and capabilities." (442).

This conceptual point is well taken as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough: a supporter of Psychologism could simply respond by giving up the possibility of error, placing his faith, a là Descartes, in a God who allows us to "see" the truth once and for all, no further questions asked or possible. Again, we need to embed (the possibility of) error in a comprehensive conceptual framework that we simply cannot give up. Indeed, Martin and McLellan acknowledge the need for further "philosophical analysis" in the research programs of educational psychologists (Martin and McLellan 2008, 446). I submit that much of this analysis has, in fact, been carried out.

To countenance Individualism and Psychologism, as characterized here, is to maintain that the individual self does not rely, conceptually, on other individual selves or on relationships among selves, and that mental states apply directly to individual agents conceived *as psychic entities*. Conceivability—as the term indicates—is nothing other than an ability to form and use *concepts*—in this case, those concepts, such as, *belief*, *desire* and *intention* which are needed to make the mentalist view of the mind intelligible, even to

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[1] Self-regulation is a reflective—and reflexive—practice which is conceptually underpinned by our capacity to be both the subject and the object of our own agency. Individualism is understood implicitly by Martin and McLellan, as the negation of the thesis that persons and their agency—including self-regulation—are constituted inter-subjectively, through various forms of social interaction. Psychologism is "the idea that processes of reasoned choice and intentional action [i.e. agency] can be explained by appeal to inner psychic entities or agents." It is "a highly interior conception of selfhood", in which the mind, the self, and all the ingredients of human agency are both mentalist and causally responsible for those (behavioral) performances we describe in terms of exercising self-management, etc. (Martin and McLellan 2008, 441).

[2] "… an overly-individualistic emphasis in education also jeopardizes students' self-sufficiency by possibly providing too little in the way of exposure to the interests and perspectives of others with whom a reasonable level of civil co-existence is necessary for both personal and societal flourishing." 440.

oneself. But what, we are entitled to ask, are the minimal conditions for formulating and applying concepts in general, and psychological concepts in particular?

One Twentieth Century philosopher who has responded to this question is P. F. Strawson, who famously argued that the concept of *person* is *primitive* with respect to the kinds of mental and physical characteristics that we attribute both to ourselves and to others. Persons are those beings to which both states of consciousness and certain corporeal characteristics can meaningfully be ascribed, where such ascriptions are semantically synonymous as between first and third person applications: not only is it the same individual who is *both* miserable *and* overweight, but whether I self-ascribe or "other"-ascribe these characteristics, I mean the same thing by them. Defending the implicit assumption that such mental predicates as "being miserable" admit of both first person and third person ascription, Strawson appeals to the "purely logical" truth that "the idea of a predicate is correlative with that of a *range* of distinguishable individuals of which the predicate can be significantly, though not necessarily truly, affirmed." (Strawson 1990, 99).[3]

Strawson's style of argument exemplifies precisely what Martin and McLellan are seeking, namely, a conceptual or a priori argument which does not rely upon—indeed cannot legitimately call upon—empirical findings. The reason is that such findings presuppose that the conceptual scheme in question at least *makes sense*:

> The point is not that we must accept this conclusion [essentially, the rejection of both Individualism and Psychologism] in order to avoid skepticism, but that we must accept it in order to explain the existence of the conceptual scheme in terms of which the skeptical problem is stated. (106).

The way is open to assigning agency—in terms of the ascription of both mental and physical states and events—to *persons* in the sense articulated by Strawson, thereby providing conceptual support for teaching and learning frameworks which are focused on *treating all students as persons*. Still, we may feel a nagging sense of incompleteness here. Granting that agency, and experience, generally, require the existence of persons as the appropriate bearers of both psychological and corporeal properties, might there not still be room for such mental or subjective entities as beliefs, desires and intentions to function as the appropriate points of reference for those nominative expressions which, grammatically at least, purport to pick them out ("his belief in God", "her desire to eat out", etc.)? The exclusion of such entities was simply not part of Strawson's project.

A comprehensive purging of Psychologism, ontologically and conceptually, requires a more careful examination of the relationship between our subjective states and powers on the one hand, and our awareness of an objective world on the other. We need to construct a plausible bridge between what is going on "in our minds" as we familiarly say, and what we experience as going on in the world.

Mind and agency; subjectivity and objectivity: these familiar concepts and their interrelationships call to mind the work of Donald Davidson, arguably the most influential

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[3] Strawson's "purely logical" truth is really one of a pair, the second of which may be stated thus: No (nontrivial) concept can be truly applied to *all* objects; in other words, for a given concept C, if we can truly predicate "C" of some object x, then there must be—conceivably if not actually—a distinct object y of which C can be meaningfully but falsely predicated.

Compare the following empirical rendering: "One becomes differentiated from others through rudimentary dissimilar experiences. If stubbing one's toe brings pain, but seeing others stub their toe brings no personal pain, one's own activity becomes distinguished from that of other persons" (Bandura 2008, 19). See also Quigley (2001) and Rychlak et al. (1986).

analytic philosopher of the last half-century.[4] His writings convey a powerful holistic understanding of the relationship between persons—as causal agents, as bearers of both mental and physical attributes, and as inquirers into meaning, truth and knowledge—and the world in which they are situated, act and are acted upon (a world which also contains other persons). Granted, Strawson, among many others, was also concerned with this relationship, but Davidson's focus on the relationships forged by those who seek to *interpret*—i.e. make sense of—the linguistic utterances of their fellows is an important point of difference. Central to this focus is the concept of *belief*, for what we believe plays a central role in what we (claim to) know and what we (intentionally) do.

In the following sections, I will outline the main features of Davidson's treatment of belief, and its implications for the subjective/objective divide in general, and the status of psychological entities in particular. I will also point out some educational implications of this analysis.

Belief, Mind and World: The Davidsonian Perspective[5]

1. Belief is a key *propositional attitude*[6]: on the one hand, highlighting each person's unique psychological or subjective stance on the world, but on the other, implicated in what each of us *knows*, objectively, and in what each of us *does*, objectively, by way of our own agency. As with other allegedly subjective states, I know what I believe without reference to behavioral or other forms of evidence, which is not the case either for my knowledge of what others believe or for others' knowledge of what I believe. This epistemological asymmetry has challenged Davidson (like Strawson before him) to justify the common-sense claim that the terms we use in assigning beliefs and other mental attributes are actually the same in first and third person cases, and to affirm that the objects to which these terms are assigned are persons, rather than minds, bodies, etc.

   The asymmetry in question may help to explain why educational assessment pays so little attention to what it is that students believe (and, we may add, value, feel, intend, hope for, etc.), focusing exclusively on what they *do*. This emphasis may seem defensible if we assume that such subjective elements are private, both epistemologically (accessible only to those who possess them) and ethically (not open to inspection by others). However, this assumption runs dangerously close to falling back on the very Cartesian dualism which both Strawson and Davidson reject. Davidson, in particular, insists that beliefs and other mental attributes belong to the public world of history and causality (Davidson 2001c, 51). It is important to make what students believe and value accessible, both to themselves and to (selected) others. Awareness of such allegedly private attributes both influences and is influenced by what—and how—teachers teach.

2. Beliefs purport to make true claims about the world, but they are not thereby determined by it, just because we often have false beliefs. Because false beliefs do not fit with the world as it is, they ought, eventually, to be discarded. Encouraging students to grasp the importance of truth-seeking as a normative ideal is a condition of rationality

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[4] For an excellent general discussion of Davidson's place in analytic philosophy, see Malpas (2009).

[5] For a detailed critique of the following points, see LePore and Ludwig (2005), especially Chapter 22.

[6] Percy's belief that the store he has entered sells cheese may be understood in terms of his holding a characteristic kind of attitude toward a certain proposition or statement (roughly: an attitude of assent or agreement to the statement that the shop in question sells cheese).

that governs all thinking and behavior (Davidson 1982). Still, if we want students to be active participants in their own learning, we need to know and to acknowledge the value of what they do believe (are committed to), notwithstanding the real possibility that those beliefs may (turn out to) be false. Indeed, a teaching environment which does not allow—whether epistemologically or behaviorally—for error and self-correction as constructive aspects of the learning process will block concept development in students. In Davidson's words, "You have the concept of a cat only if you can make sense of the idea of *misapplying* the concept, of believing or judging that something is a cat which is not a cat" (Davidson 1999, 124).

3. For Davidson, an agent's beliefs figure in both an explanation and a causal account of his subsequent actions. Explaining just how beliefs can play these dual roles which are different in kind—one having to do with rationality and the other with material causality—has been a major part of Davidson's work. In education, the idea of *students as agents* is crucial to any account which rejects the view of students as passive recipients of "knowledge".

4. Beliefs do not come one-by-one, but in clusters and networks. In Davidson's writing, we find two connected lines of thought here: one positing a constitutive link between rationality and propositional attitudes such as beliefs, desires, hopes, and intentions; the other defending the view that such propositional attitudes that are constitutive of rationality come as "a matched set", i.e. in patterns, not singly or even in a straightforwardly linear arrangement:

… we cannot intelligibly attribute any propositional attitude to an agent except within the framework of a viable theory of his beliefs, desires, intentions, and decisions… the content of a propositional attitude derives from its place in the pattern [of the many other attitudes with which it coheres] (D. Davidson 1970), 221ff.; see also (D. Davidson 1982)

Taken together, we have one of Davidson's signature theses: *the Holism of the Mental* (HM). HM links not only beliefs, but beliefs with other propositional attitudes (desires, intentions, hopes, fears, …) and behaviors: "Beliefs and desires conspire to cause, rationalize and explain intentional actions." (Davidson 1999, 125).

HM is a semantic thesis about what is involved, not just in having beliefs, but in understanding the concept of belief (what beliefs are)—i.e. that what I hold in a particular instance is a belief, not a desire, or hope, etc. It tells us that if children are to master this concept and, in turn, concepts which subsume it—most notably, *knowledge*—then they must learn to navigate their way in the domain of *rational discourse*. They must have a good understanding both of how various claims and assertions are connected—as inferences, assumptions, etc.—and of how their own such claims are connected to those of others. Needless to say, we make these connections via language in general, and dialogue with others, in particular. For Davidson, participation in the public, objective—or, at least, inter-subjective—world in which language and dialogue belong is both a necessary and sufficient condition of our capacity to think, believe (including false belief) and act. To encourage students to explore, reflect upon and critique their own and others' beliefs *is* to encourage them to learn about the world in which they are situated (Davidson 1982).

5. The beliefs we hold with respect to a given concept are part and parcel of what it means to *have* that concept (Davidson 1999, 124). I cannot be said meaningfully to have a belief about quadratic trinomials if I have no conception or understanding of

what a quadratic trinomial is; conversely, I cannot be said to grasp the concept of a quadratic trinomial if there are no beliefs about such entities to which I am prepared to assent.

Such semantic constraints throw new light on the familiar idea that children cannot have genuine knowledge about anything which they do not understand (an idea meant to cast doubt on the merits of rote learning and memorization). Without a significant measure of understanding, it is not just that they would lack *grounds* for believing what they read, recite, are told, etc.; but that they could not even be said to *believe* it. In Davidson's words:

These mental attributes are, then, equivalent: to have a concept, to entertain propositions [including propositional attitudes such as belief], to be able to form judgments, to have command of the concept of truth. If a creature has one of these attributes, it has them all. (D. Davidson 1995b), 9.

The pervasively holistic nature of the mental leaves no room for the old-fashioned, but persistent idea that learning is a linear process which must begin with "the basics". To insist that children can learn before they can make judgments or conceptualize (in short, *think*) reflects an impoverished view of what kinds of creatures they—and we—are.

6. The thesis of HM allows us to reiterate the point that truth and truth-seeking are normative ideals pertaining to human rationality. For Davidson, the very idea of error (e.g. holding a belief which turns out to be false) presupposes a background in which most of what we believe is actually true:

Because of the holistic character of empirical belief, it is impossible that all our beliefs about the world are false… we cannot harbor particular false (or true) beliefs about particular beliefs unless we have many true beliefs about the nature of such objects.[7]

How might such a "principle of charity", as Davidson terms it, be applied to children? Even as they play with ideas, testing the limits of what makes sense to them, they may plausibly be said to operate within a general framework of truth. It is sometimes said that leaving children to their own devices when solving a problem or, generally, seeking for truth, is dangerous because there is no guarantee that what they will come up with—even when working collaboratively—is true. But in this respect, children are no different from the rest of us; we all require, from time to time, guidance and direction from those considered (more) expert with respect to the field in question. In classrooms, such guidance and expertise can, indeed, should, come from the teacher, although the issue of how she might intervene without blocking or sabotaging students' own thought and inquiry processes is by no means a trivial one.[8]

Are children protected from or immune to the kind of "radical incoherence" (massive irrationality or falsehood) that, for Davidson, can be more confidently ruled out for fully-fledged members of a language or interpretive community? Yes they are, provided that we adults are prepared to treat them as genuine persons, acknowledging and respecting their emergent frameworks of beliefs, concepts, patterns of reasoning, etc. If the "coherence-like" theory of truth defended by Davidson is correct—wherein

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[7] (D. Davidson, 2001a), 195. Also (D. Davidson, 1982); (D. Davidson, 1994; D. Davidson, 2001e).

[8] I return to the teacher's role in the final section of the paper. See also Splitter and Sharp (1995), Splitter (2010).

"belief is in its nature veridical"—it surely applies to children as much as to anyone else of whom it may be said that they form and hold beliefs about the world (Davidson 1983, 146).

7. … the basic triangle of two people and a common world is one of which we must be aware if we have any thoughts at all. If I can think, I know that there are others with minds like my own, and that we inhabit a public time and space filled with objects and events many of which are … known to others. In particular I, like every other rational creature, have three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the objective world…; knowledge of the minds of others; and knowledge of the contents of my own mind. None of these three sorts of knowledge is reducible to either of the other two, or to any other two in combination. (D. Davidson 1998), 86–7.

Davidson's principle of *triangulation* plays a key role in his later writings (Davidson 1982, 1999, 2001a, e). It is designed, in part, to block the Cartesian skeptic's attempt to restrict—or otherwise prioritize—knowledge to the first person; but Davidson also uses it to account, conceptually, for what we already know to be the case, namely, that we interpret one another's responses to certain stimuli as confirmation that we share, and can communicate about, a common (i.e. objective) world; indeed, our capacity so to interpret one another—to behave intersubjectively—constitutes our understanding of what we mean by commonality or objectivity. Davidson asks: "…concealed behind the epistemological problem, and conceptually prior to it, is: how did we come by the concept of an objective reality in the first place?" (Davidson 1995b, 3). It is to this question which he claims the principle of triangulation provides an answer.[9]

Claims to propositional knowledge involve assertions of belief. But, as noted above, one cannot be a believer unless one has the concept of belief which, in turn, involves grasping the distinction between what is claimed to be true and what is actually true (i.e. the concept of *error*). Where, Davidson asks, "do we get the idea that we may be mistaken, that things may not be as we think they are?" (Davidson 1999, 129). Drawing on Wittgenstein's interpretation of *following a rule*, Davidson proposes "that we would not have the concept of getting things wrong or right if it were not for our interactions with other people". Simply put, through language, we share our observations and beliefs about the world with others, and we note that from time to time, these do not correlate; therefore, one of us must be mistaken. This conceptual link to language was missing from the account offered by Martin and McLellan, above.

One further move is warranted here. It may be that the base of Davidson's triangle—viz. the link between myself and others—requires merely the existence of one other speaker with whom I can communicate. But a more reliable base for knowledge involves a larger number of such speakers. In practice, we play off a range of assertions and beliefs as we work out which ones stand up to standards of reason, evidence, and justification. Such a range is provided within a cooperative *community* of thinkers, all of whom are inquiring after truth by way of determining, interpreting, and evaluating what is presented to them. Interestingly, while it is not clear that he intended to make the shift from a single interlocutor to a community, Davidson writes:

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[9] See Davidson (1992). Avramides provides a nice summary statement of Davidson's position here: "So, while we find that our knowledge of the world depends on the communication between persons, we also find that the communication between persons depends on our recognition that we occupy a shared world." (Avramides 1999, 148).

"A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things". (Davidson 2001e, 218). Here, I suggest, is a link, hitherto unremarked upon, between Davidson's holistic views on mind, language and the world, on the one hand, and a distinctive pedagogic and classroom structure based on the notion of a *community of thinkers*, on the other. I take up this connection below.

The Status of Mind: Davidson's Rejection of Psychologism

Davidson's account of the mind and its properties leaves no room for the thesis of Individualism as articulated above. The concepts which lie at the heart of each person's subjectivity—most notably the propositional attitudes—can be understood only within a framework in which thinkers, speakers and interpreters interact with one another. But what does this account have to say about the conceptual and ontological status of such psychological objects as beliefs and other mental states and attitudes?

The so-called subjective elements referred to above purportedly belong to an ontological realm which has traditionally included ideas, sensations, impressions, souls, thoughts, representations, sense-data, qualia, and objects of thought. A parent seeks to reassure his child that the "bogey-man" is not "real" because it is "merely" in the child's mind? Such a response, as soothing as it may be, begs the question of "where" the object of the child's fear is really located, by alluding to that shadowy entity "the mind". Davidson argues that we do not need such mysterious entities as objects of thought/fear/belief, etc., in order to understand and interpret such statements as "I am convinced that the moon is made of green cheese", and "I am terrified of the bogey-man".[10] And he maintains, further, that any attempt to ground our knowledge of the external world on such subjective entities is doomed: were such entities required for our subjective knowledge, we could not comprehend how to move to anything objective; i.e. "to beat a reliable track from the inside to the outside" (Davidson 1987, 34). Since objectivity—in terms of both the existence of objects external to the mind and the possibility of objective knowledge—can now be assumed (based on Davidson's triangular framework), we can see why Davidson comes to the conclusion that the dualism of internal/subjective and external/objective should be rejected.

We may still wonder if there is room for a subjectivist classification of beliefs and other mental entities, provided that there were some way of linking them to the external world that ruled out, once and for all, a conceptually privileged domain of the mental. It is in response to this scenario that we find Davidson at his most insightful, for far from rejecting the idea that there is a connection between our minds and the world, he embraces it wholeheartedly, arguing that the connection in question is ordinary (physical) *causality* (Davidson 2001e, 216). Intuitively, the moon plays a causal role with respect to my sensations of, and beliefs about it (whether or not those beliefs are true), just as my fear of the bogey-man is, at least in part, caused (and explained) by my experience of *something* in the world.

Still, we are entitled to ask for some further elucidation of the kind of causality and the nature of its respective relata—i.e. causes and effects—Davidson has in mind here. Here we come to what is arguably the most celebrated of Davidson's theses, which maintains that mental relata, in so far as they are causally potent, are also physical or material entities, not objects of thought *per se*. Indeed, there are no such objects. The child's fear of the bogey-man is as real as he is—it is, literally, a part of him—but there is no bogey-man,

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[10] See especially the first half dozen papers in his 2001d.

ergo no reference to one in the expression of his fear. There are the concepts or ideas of *the bogey-man* and *fear*, but the formal device of predication allows us to accommodate concepts semantically, free of any ontological commitment. As to the fear itself, when it is experienced, it is a *token* event which, for Davidson, will be identical with some physical state (known or unknown) of the child. These are some of the implications of the thesis known as "Anomalous Monism" (AM) or "Non- Reductive Physicalism".[11]

AM claims that: (A) there are no objects to which mental, but not physical, predicates apply; and (B) the psychological concepts we employ in describing and explaining human agency, emotion, etc. cannot be reduced to or replaced by physical ones. The upshot of (A) and (B) is that while there is mentalist language, there are no "purely mental" objects. Psychologism, as interpreted in this paper, is false.[12]

AM relies, famously, upon reconciling three seemingly incompatible claims, from which it follows deductively:

1. *The Principle of Causal Interaction* (PCI): At least some mental events interact causally with physical events (as intentional agents, we cause things to happen in the world) (Davidson 2001b, 208).
2. *The Cause Law Thesis* (CLT) (aka *The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality*): In Davidson's words, "…where there is causality, there must be a law: events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws" {{22 Davidson, Donald 2001}}, 208.
3. *The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental* (PAM): "There are no strict laws … on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained." {{22 Davidson, Donald 2001}}, 208.

In support of (1) (PCI), the very idea of agency assumes that at least some mental and physical events are causally related. Moreover, we may surely take it that among the former are, if not *all* beliefs, desires and attitudes, then certainly a large chunk of them. As Davidson points out, the thesis of AM applies to just these items.

For Davidson, the a priori presumption of a governing law which underpins, explains and predicts singular causal connections ((2) above) is warranted by understanding what it means to say that one event causes another. Davidson maintains that we can "directly perceive that one event has caused another, even when we have no supporting evidence drawn from similar cases" (D. Davidson 1995a, 208), and that events—conceived as *changes* in the world—require the kinds of explanations which laws achieve (212). Davidson takes this line of thought to be conceptual rather than empirical: "Our concept of a physical object is the concept of an object whose changes are governed by laws." (214).

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[11] Davidson (2001b). See also Davidson (1993, 1995a). Davidson's work produced a sea-change in thinking about the realm of the mental. Familiar phrases such as "a given mental event" or "mind–body identity" had now to be unpacked much more carefully, being ambiguous as to token or type status. Other writers have offered sympathetic variations on Davidson's original thesis; for example McGinn and Hopkins (1978); also Kim (1993a, b). A recent review article ends with these words:

> At present, non reductive physicalism is (probably still) the dominant position in Anglo-American philosophy of mind. Its proponents … have even called the nonidentity of mental content with any physical properties "practically received wisdom" among philosophers of mind (Bickle, Fall 2008).

> Still, the debate continues; see Yalowitz (2008).

[12] The defeat of Psychologism actually only requires (A), but the educational implications of (A) and (B) together are significant. (B) challenges a tendency among cognitive psychologists to shore up the scientific status of psychology by reducing many of its general statements to those of physics. See Martin et al. (2003).

The core claim, (3) (PAM) is, itself, a direct consequence of two further claims: first, there are no purely psychological laws; and secondly, there are no strict "psychophysical" laws either, that is, "…no strict laws relating events under physical descriptions with events under mental descriptions" (Davidson 1995a, 204). The first of these claims follows from PCI: Davidson maintains that our conception of what counts as mental—by contrast with the physical realm—does not constitute "a closed system": it is conceptually unrealistic to hope for the kind of explanatory regularity that laws provide, within the realm of the mental as we understand it: "Too much happens to affect the mental that is not itself a systematic part of the mental" (Davidson 2001b, 224).

The second claim denies the existence of strict law-like connections between (descriptions of) mental events and (descriptions of) physical events; or, as Davidson sometimes put it, there is no way of reducing mental concepts to physical ones. In support of this anti-reductionist position, Davidson appeals to the principle of the "Holism of the Mental" (HM), discussed above under #4. Whatever we wish to say about the ontology of particular ("token") mental events, HM rules out the possibility of any systematic—including nomological—reduction of mental concepts or kinds ("types") to physical ones.

In true dialogical style, Davidson responded to critics of his work, taking the opportunity to reflect on and reformulate his case for AM. Reflecting some 20 years after the seminal paper "Mental events", he writes that in the domain of physics, there is always the possibility of finding more specific and more detailed explanations as expert knowledge expands and deepens. By contrast, in seeking to explain human actions, we appeal to highly context-specific reasons (often in the form of beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.), "so we can see for ourselves what it was about the action that appealed to the agent" (Davidson 1995a, 216). But, says Davidson, such appeals do not cite strict laws. When it comes to agency, we seek the best fit in the circumstances, not the precision sought in physics.

Notwithstanding his declared aversion to dualist theories, Davidson juxtaposes two quite different conceptual paradigms in accounting for human action. On one hand, there is—whether known or unknown—a causal chain of events involving, among other things, particular or token beliefs, desires and intentional behaviors (ultimately, this chain must exist in the physical realm). *That* there is such a chain is taken for granted in seeking to understand and explain a person's actions (i.e. their intentional behavior). But, on the other hand, such explanations cannot be formulated in purely physical terms, but appeal, instead, to human rationality; specifically, to the beliefs, desires and intentions of rational agents (*inter alia*) which function now as (context-specific) *reasons* for action (see points 1–4 above in relation to belief). Explanations couched in purely physical terms miss the point if they are posited as accounting for agency, even though they can, we may suppose, account for everything that actually happens in the world. The difference, then, is not in the world, but in our descriptions and our understanding of it.

Between the mental and the physical—or, rather between our (shared) knowledge of the mental and our (shared) knowledge of the physical—there is both complete inter-dependence and complete incommensurability. However, this inter-dependence masks a crucial asymmetry which constitutes "the ultimate springs of the difference between understanding minds and understanding the world as physical" (Davidson 2001e, 218).

There is a directness—a sense of triviality—in knowing the propositional contents of my own mind (what I think, believe, etc.) that is not present in the case of my knowing the contents of other minds. Still, it must be the case that I do have such third person knowledge, just as it must be the case that together (through communication as a "community of minds" (218)), we may claim jointly to hold a correct view of the world; these

forms of knowledge, together with my own self-knowledge constitute the three interdependent vertices of Davidson's epistemological triangle:

> Communication, and the knowledge of other minds that it presupposes, is the basis of our concept of objectivity, our recognition of a distinction between false and true belief… (217–8).

The standard of correctness that comes from our ongoing communication with one another about the world cannot look to anything beyond itself for further justification. We can seek out other voices for corroboration or refinement, but as Davidson points out, "this leads not to something intrinsically different, just to more of the same." (218). So we are all engaged in attempting to understand and to "know" the (details of the) objective world by way of the ongoing interaction of one or more communities of minds; the standard of objectivity is, in other words, given through communication, whereas when it comes to communication *per se*, there can be no further standard beyond itself. Here, I take it, lies the source of the asymmetry Davidson is seeking.

Psychology and Ontology: There are No Mental Kinds

Martin and his colleagues have defended a conception of agency which regards persons, along with their various physical and psychological attributes as *emergent human or psychological kinds*, Their aim, laudable in itself, is to steer a path that avoids physical reductionism as well as the "pre-given isolated individual of modernity and the collectively determined, socially constructed product of some postmodern theorizing" (Martin et al. 2003, 112). Adapting terminology from Hacking (1995, 354), Hacking (1999), they claim that we have "kinds of people, kinds of human action, and varieties of human behavior", which become the proper subject matter of psychology.[13] Such "agentic kinds", which include beliefs, desires, reasons, actions, goals—even subjectivity—are supposed to constitute explanatory frameworks which draw, not just on a pre-existing physical reality, but on emergent realities within society, culture and psychology. How do human or agentic kinds fare in the context of Anomalous Monism? Not well, I suggest.

I interpret Davidson to be claiming that the idea of *types* or *kinds* of mental events leads to a dead end, if such generalized groupings are meant to have causal or explanatory significance. When we think of natural kinds in the physical world, we envisage being able to explain the law-like behavior of members of a given kind by reference to the kind itself: spoonsful of sugar dissolve in cups of tea because sugar and water are the *kinds of substances* in which one is soluble with respect to the other. By contrast, individual beliefs (as representative of our mental states) cause and are caused, but the concept of belief is excluded from participating in the sorts of explanatory laws that we associate with kinds.

It is true that for Davidson, we not only have beliefs, we also have the *concept* of belief, but we need to be clear about our ontological commitments here. Particular persons and their particular mental states exist, but to speak about and use concepts is, in reality, to predicate various properties and characteristics of persons. In such a semantic scheme, *concepts play crucial roles, but they are referentially empty*. Kinds, on the other hand—if they are to count for anything at all—have explanatory status stemming from crucial features that members of the kind have in common—features which are constitutive of it. But this is precisely what AM rules out in the case of so-called mental kinds. To reiterate,

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[13] Martin et al. (2003, 10); also 103, 117, 126.

particular mental entities, including token (datable, non-recurring) beliefs and desires, exist in the physical world. We grasp the concept of belief in the sense that we understand what "belief" means; we say, colloquially, that we understand what beliefs *are* and how they feature in explanations of behavior, etc.; but there is no space—physically, biologically, socio-culturally *or* psychologically—in which all, or even a sub-type, of beliefs are gathered together in order to generate such explanations.

Confusion over this issue is not merely "semantic". Albert Bandura, the leading cognitive and social psychologist, having expressly endorsed Nonreductive Physicalism (AM) writes: "Each level of phenomena—physical, chemical, biological, *psychological*, socio-structural—involves emergent new properties that are distinct to that level and must be explained by *laws in its own right*". He adds: "[A] full explanation of human learning must, therefore, encompass both the *psychosocial principles* and the subserving neuro-biological principles" (Bandura 2008, 30) [emphasis added]. But AM entails that there are *no such laws or principles* (if the latter are to carry appropriate explanatory force). Where, we may then ask, does this leave the issue of understanding and explaining such vital psychological phenomena as agency?[14]

As already noted, explanations of agency are irrevocably contextual. In this regard, we may compare that part of psychology which seeks to understand and explain human behavior to history or anthropology, rather than to physics or biology—i.e. in (largely) *narrative* rather than nomological terms. If there are any generalized or law-like constraints on the construction of such narratives, they are constraints pertaining to *rationality*—i.e. that which makes sense in the circumstances (particularly in regard to agency, where rational explanation of actions is central). And the "laws" in question will be *semantic*—viz. the laws of logic (construed broadly) and reasoning. This agentic "dualism" of particular, situated narratives and the general logic(s) which underlie them has important implications for teaching, learning and classroom organization, an issue I move, finally, to discuss.

Education as Enacting and Exciting the Life of the Mind

Davidson's views on the triangular inter-dependence of mind, language and the world fit neatly with the idea that learning environments should operate as *inquiring communities*, in which students and teachers work collaboratively in order to "dig deep" into questions and topics of interest to both parties. Being part of a community of thinkers who understand, develop, and evaluate one another's beliefs, perspectives and assertions is both necessary and sufficient for the pursuit of what may be termed "objective truth"; the lines of communication with others make it possible for each thinker to articulate the distinction between what seems to be true (what I believe) and what is actually true. Here, then, is a

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[14] In their more recent book, Martin et al. in line with the analysis offered by Peter Hacker, modify their ontological view of kinds in favor of what I should call a more "Strawsonian" approach, viz. that human agency is not conducted by elements or components of persons, but by persons themselves (Martin et al. 2010, 157). Accordingly, they no longer refer to such elements as constituting explanatory or agentic kinds. While this change meets part of my concern, I believe that Davidson's approach, and his artful defense of AM in particular, include at least one point overlooked by Martin and his colleagues. For Davidson, as noted earlier, human action has both causal (= physical) and explanatory (= semantic or linguistic) dimensions. Ontologically, persons are physical objects constituted of other physical objects, all of which behave in accordance with the laws of physics. But semantically—i.e. in terms of understanding and explaining why we do what we do—we function as rational and intentional agents. Where Martin et al. refer, in the later book, to persons as "irreducible selves", they appear, again, to equivocate between these two dimensions.

striking line of attack against traditional didactic or teacher-centered pedagogies: once we make the connection between knowledge and objective truth, on the one hand, and each person's actual beliefs and thoughts on the other, we can only join the two via a triangle which brings into the picture one or more fellow believers and thinkers with whom each person must be in some form of interpretive communication. It seems to me that this is a scenario which Davidson would endorse.

I can imagine an objection to Davidson's triangulation thesis which might claim particular traction in the educational context, where the teacher is in a privileged epistemological position vis-à-vis her students. The objection runs as follows: We may grant that students learn a great deal about the world (and each other) from their peers through the normal lines of communication, both formal and informal. But the teacher is not merely one more member of the student's interpretive framework, because by virtue of her authority, she conveys knowledge of the world *directly* to students. She thereby plays the dual roles of communicator *and* source of objective knowledge, reducing Davidson's triangle to a single line (or, more precisely, to two lines: from student A to teacher-as-fellow interpreter B, and A to the world C, but B and C are actually identical). The upshot of this reduction is a retreat to a didactic or teacher-centered pedagogy; after all, if the teacher can play this role some of the time, why not all of the time?

Responding to this objection involves reflecting on the nature of the communication or interaction between teacher and student(s). The point of the base-line in the Davidsonian triangle—i.e. the link between one thinker and another—is to provide conceptual support for the idea that a single thinker cannot understand (hold concepts about) the world—cannot even hold any beliefs about it (or themselves)—unless she is in a certain kind of interpretive or dialogical relationship with others. Roughly speaking, my own engagement in the quest for knowledge is equivalent to my own dialogical engagement with others. Now it is quite possible for the teacher to be one of these "others", but only if she is willing to embrace the role of equal dialogical partner, so to speak. This, in turn, means giving up or, at least, playing down, her role as expert (source of knowledge, direct link to the world). If, on the other hand, she plays only the kind of didactic role imagined in the above scenario, then the individual student is left epistemologically stranded, lacking the conceptual tools for constructing a coherent set of beliefs about the world, making judgments as to their truth or falsity, etc. Didactic teaching, then, runs the risk of producing students who not only lack understanding of what they are learning, but are incapable of playing *any* autonomous cognitive role in that process.

Good teachers are neither overly didactic nor pedagogically "absent". They are responsible for prodding learners in the direction of the "accepted" truth or fund of knowledge of which all informed learning must take account. Reverting to the Davidsonian metaphor, as long as the base-line of student–student interaction is in place, the teacher will, from time to time, need to "represent the objective world" in her responses to that dialogue. But she should be prepared for—indeed, should encourage—students to challenge and refine their shared view of that world. In terms reminiscent of John Dewey, her responses and representations serve, at best, as *starting points* for inquiry and learning.

"The life of the mind", as I like to call it, is both enabled and enriched by enabling and enriching, in turn, the quality of inter-personal relationships—not as some kind of curricular "add-on" or option, but as a key ingredient. This point is well-captured by taking seriously the notion of the classroom as a *community of inquiry* (CoI), in which dialogue—or "thinking-out-loud"—is the key mode of relating. The place, indeed the existence, of each member is bound up with her relationships to others. This idea, which I have expressed in terms of each person seeing her/himself as *one among others*, is but one

variation on the Strawsonian idea that the concept of a person is primitive, in that it preempts the need—or the possibility—to search for "the self" either by looking inward to the subjective domain, or outward to something beyond ourselves. It also staves off the Post-Modernist notion that there is no such thing as persons, construed as identifiable individuals.[15]

In the course of dialogue, we express and find out about what we and others believe, know, value, feel and think. We move back and forth between self and other, but Davidson is encouraging us not to regard this movement as one that crosses ontological boundaries between subjective and objective; rather, it weaves a semantic path, aimed at furthering mutual understanding, appreciation and knowledge. In treading this path, we ride "on the backs of" our concepts which, in practice, means by way of language.

Davidson is not alone in endorsing the interdependence of "thought" and "talk", particularly in the context of education. The names of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Mead, Dewey, Bruner, Lipman and others come readily to mind (Splitter 2009, 2010). But what Davidson offers is a conceptual argument, not an empirical or developmental one (although, needless to say, it complements nicely a Vygotskyan framework, in which cognitive and social development are interdependent).[16]

Observing a classroom dialogue among children, one is struck by the correspondence between participants' attempts to come to terms with a problematic concept, question, or idea, on the one hand, and the behaviors which characterize Davidson's triangulation process, on the other. The moves are similar, irrespective of the stage of development of those involved: Chen expresses a half-baked thought which prompts Yishue to step in— "Are you trying to say *this*?"—and Lee to contribute a pertinent example, or a reason they can jointly access and evaluate; but Wong responds with a challenge in the form of a counter-example or counter-argument; Chen reflects and decides that Wong has a point, thereby refining his original view; someone else asks a probing question, or gives an analogy, and so on. In Davidsonian terms, from each participant's perspective, such interaction has three (kinds of) players: oneself, other speakers and listeners, and the world, where the last-mentioned is not just the simple world of objects but a conceptual space which we are attempting, together, to understand and make sense of.

The dialogical procedures which are constitutive of a CoI are based on a lot more than merely valuing cooperative and collaborative learning. Further, the dialogue itself is not merely procedural. The thoughts expressed, the reasons given, the examples offered, the beliefs reinforced, challenged or revised—all are rich in content that brings together both the subject matter of the inquiry and those engaged in it. Davidson's triangle, assuming its semantic accuracy, is not an *option*, to be preferred to some more autonomous process or activity. Moreover, we should resist the "Post-Modernist" idea that truth and reality are nothing more than the sum of whatever it is that a given community comes up with. Granted, the procedures of inquiry, thus depicted, are constructivist through and through; but we must be careful to distinguish the idea that learning—along with the knowledge that

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[15] For one discussion of this kind of viewpoint, see Hall (1992, 277).

[16] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for pointing out that Davidson's triangle meta-phor, or versions of it, has been used by a number of developmental, cognitive and social psychologists. Zittoun et al. (2007) offer an insightful analysis of several such accounts, covering the work of Vygotsky, Freud, Piaget and, even, Mead. However, even assuming that the respective vertices and lines of these triangles correspond to those in Davidson's model—viz. myself, another speaker and a world we both share—(an assumption which appears implausible at first sight), the major difference is conceptual: where the psychological focus is on development, Davidson is more interested in epistemic and semantic inter-connections that the elements of the triangle represent.

results—is constructed (both from prior learnings and in collaboration with others)—which seems to me to be empirically undeniable—from the more radical notion that the same collaborative process actually constructs the reality of which we claim to have knowledge. The latter has led critics to protest that the fruits of collaborative inquiry, as tempting as they may be, have nothing to do with the hard face of reality. Put simply: no amount of subjective—or inter-subjective—engagement will yield objectivity.

This is not the place to embark on a detailed critique of constructivism or social constructionism.[17] Still, an imagined Davidsonian response, based on our earlier discussion, will be helpful: the usual terms of the dispute over the place of constructivist pedagogy take for granted that there is a difference, in principle, between what learners construct and what is actually "out there" in the world. But Davidson rejects this assumption which is just a version of the old dualism between the subjective and the objective. Indeed, the assumption is rejected as soon as we accept the possibility of dialogue among persons as thinkers, believers and knowers:

> All propositional thought, whether positive or skeptical, whether of the inner or of the outer, requires possession of the concept of objective truth, and this concept is accessible only to those creatures that are in communication with others. Knowledge of other minds is thus basic to all thought. But such knowledge requires and assumes knowledge of a shared world of objects in a common time and space. Thus the acquisition of knowledge is not based on a progression from the subjective to the objective; it emerges holistically, and is interpersonal from the start. (D. Davidson 1995b, 18).

In the previous section, I referred to a rather different dualism in the context of the non-reducibility of agency, viz. the agentic dualism of particular narratives and the general logic(s) which underlie(s) them. I submit that when we consider the actual practice of dialogue, we see this same dualism at work. Indeed, it is hard to see how anything other than a dialogical framework could accommodate it.

The structural flow of the dialogue in a CoI may be represented by a graph whose axes are, respectively, time or duration, and the locus of thinking that ranges from surface-level to deeper or higher levels (Fig. 1). Dialogue seeks a harmonious interplay, over time, between more concrete moves (expressing an opinion, citing an example from one's own experience, suggesting a pertinent analogy) and more abstract ones (formulating and applying a general rule or criterion, making an inference or derivation according to a formula or set of logical principles, proposing a genuine claim to knowledge, …). We do not need to give up the notion that dialogue aims at resolution—answering a question, understanding a problem—relating to objects and events which belong squarely in the world that those engaged in the dialogue share, in order to insist that the sole ingredients for dialogue are the opinions, beliefs and values of its participants. As the richness of the dialogue increases, so too does the richness of our understanding and knowledge of ourselves, of one another, and of the world. This, surely, was Davidson's point when he remarked: "There are no definite limits to how far dialogue can or will take us." (Davidson 2001e, 219).

I am proposing that we see the dialogical movement between more concrete and more abstract levels of thinking as reflecting the dualism of anecdotal or particularistic, *versus* lawlike or general dimensions of self and agency. Dialogue is grounded in the actual and imagined experiences of those participating, often expressed anecdotally and contextually.

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[17] See Splitter (2009).
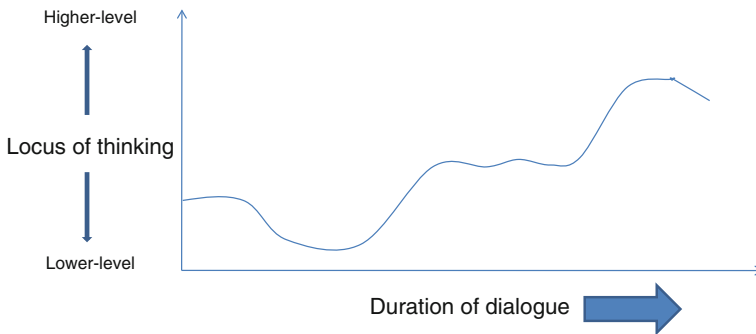
Fig. 1 The flow of dialogue

There is no need to appeal to any kind of reductionism or psychologism as an ontological, semantic or epistemological base. But dialogue cannot be entirely particularistic or anecdotal; progress depends, in part, on satisfying the demands of rationality, which includes not only formulating and applying criteria constitutive of good reasoning, etc., but reshaping the particular and the individualistic into candidates for rational judgment. To cite a practical example, students engaging in dialogue need to appreciate the transition from expressing a personal opinion or offering an example from their own experience, to providing a reason for the former or a point of connection between the latter and something more general or universalizable. Opinions and examples may qualify as starting points, but they do not take us far precisely because, as personal expressions, they are usually not open either to refinement or challenge by others. A good teacher will ask the kinds of questions that prompt students to move beyond the strictly personal to the more public space of the inter-personal (and also, where appropriate, back again).

The account I offer here can be strengthened, both conceptually and developmentally, by reflecting on the work of G. H. Mead, a psychologist-cum-philosopher whose ideas have not always received the attention they deserve. In several illuminating papers (Martin 2007a, b), Martin explains the role of Mead's theory of *perspectival realism* in both personal development and education. From an early age, we learn to shift perspectives between our own and those of others with whom we interact—typically, in play, but later, in more formal educational contexts. Beginning pre-linguistically, pre-reflectively, and in such familiar concrete situations as game playing, and evolving over time to language-dependent, reflective and deliberative activities like seeing an issue from a range of perspectives and displaying empathy, children construct and participate in relational networks in which their personhood is defined and developed.

Perspective-taking, as understood by Martin, is a non-reductive, relational exercise, which calls upon both the child's cognitive and imaginative capacities (while strengthening both) to grasp, share and manipulate "significant symbols"—specifically, language (2007a, 439). Importantly, the relations in question are *triangular* in nature, suggesting a clear sense of continuity from Mead to Davidson to Martin:

> …all perspectives have their origins in our social interactivity with others. They arise and are maintained within social, collective acts involving two or more individuals, and they focus on social, collective objects…whose meanings are shared by the participating individuals. (Martin 2007a, 439)

Perspective-taking is crucial in education, particularly as young learners move away from the particular and the anecdotal to more generalized perspectives which represent those social and cultural accomplishments deemed worthy of being taught to, and internalized by, them. However, here I am more prescriptive than Martin (and, perhaps, Mead as well): as most students can attest, the transition from the spontaneous, pre-theoretical perspective-taking of early childhood to that required by teachers, schools and examinations is one that all too often leaves their own perspectives behind. The necessary objectification of the child's subjective world, as engineered by the processes of formal education, may result in her coming to see herself as mere *object*, stripped of that essential sense of a subjective self which makes genuine agency possible. It is precisely in the interests of allowing students to maintain a balanced meta-perspective (a perspective on their own perspectives) that I have pressed for a central place to be given to such intellectually and affectively empowering processes as dialogue and communal inquiry.

I am advocating a view of education as enacting, exciting and nurturing *the life of the mind*. But this idea is at odds with much that actually happens in schools and classrooms. Whatever rhetoric there may be about producing excellent thinkers is all too often betrayed in practice, where genuine, self-correcting (reflective, self-regulating), deliberative thinking and dialogue are confined to isolated pockets of society.

Part of the problem is the tendency for educational theorists and practitioners to continue to under-play the importance of thinking as an intrinsically collaborative activity. Indeed, we should be speaking about nurturing the *lives* of *their minds* since one mind, alone, is not only helpless but impossible. A great deal of contemporary policy-making in education clings to a narrow conception, both in treating learners as isolated individuals, and in reducing them still further to quantifiable components. Testing, both small- and large-scale, continues to dominate the lives of teachers, students, administrators and parents, and testing remains, notoriously, individualistic and reductionist.

It might be thought that as an indicator of performance, testing at least takes to heart the futility of attempting to delve into the realms of individual subjectivity, but its core assumptions are flawed. In clinging to an individualistic model of learning, thinking and evaluation, the individual person is removed from the framework of persons which is required for genuine thought—both superficial and more reflective—to occur.

Applying Davidson's model of triangulation leads to rejecting as literally inconceivable the idea that while thinking and understanding are individualistic activities, learning and knowledge involve direct relationships between oneself and the world. To understand any of the four—thinking, understanding, learning and knowing—is to appreciate not only their interdependence but the interdependence among fellow learners and knowledge-seekers.

I can imagine questions coming from several directions and will conclude by acknowledging just one. The (inter)dependence of thought on language, *a là* Davidson and, to a lesser extent, Strawson, may seem at odds with a more pluralistic view of both thought and communication. What about students who think with their hands, or their bodies? Or those whose intelligence is more musical than linguistic, more interpersonal than logico-mathematical?

However we are to understand the relationship between thought and language, I accept both that not all thought is linguistic and that there are those who appear, at least, to be effective but "not-very" linguistic thinkers. I cannot find any specific comment by Davidson in relation to this point, and while he does emphasize such theses as the holism of the mental, it could be said that in so far as propositional thinking and having command of such concepts as belief and truth are tied to language, it follows that non-linguistic thought is neither propositional nor linked conceptually to (declarative) belief and truth.

However, it does not follow that language and linguistic communication play no privileged role with respect to thinking. Consider concepts, for example. Concepts are crucial ingredients of what is commonly called "higher-order thinking", which is now regarded as a vital component in teaching for better thinking and judgment formation. Helping students identify and work with concepts (all of which are abstract to some extent, although some are more abstract than others: compare *beauty* and *justice* to *cat* and *dog*) is a—if not *the*— key to helping them reflect, deliberate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate. But, as discussed above, concepts cannot be separated from the language used to define and identify them; they are an indispensable part of Davidson's holistic framework. Hence concepts are as much "dialogical objects" as they are objects of thought or introspection. In short, even assuming that various forms of thinking are not linguistic, it seems reasonable to insist that the higher levels of thinking which are regarded as important in just about every curriculum area *are* linguistic. The painter and football player may think spatio-kinaesthetically (however that is interpreted), but when they reflect on and evaluate their work—particularly among peers or students—they revert to the familiar linguistic activities of speaking, listening, reading and writing, with and among their fellows.

Concluding Comment

To those urging a more interactive—specifically, dialogical—and humanistic (or person-centered) approach to formal education and schooling, Davidson, perhaps the leading voice in semantics and analytic philosophy over the past 50 years, may seem an unlikely ally. But, as I have tried to portray in this paper, there is much that we can glean from his work that is relevant. Akin to Socrates 2,000 years before him, but calling upon a considerably stronger body of (conceptual and empirical) theory in support, Davidson has—albeit unwittingly—explained why the oft-heard call to "return to the basics" of "the 3-Rs" actually misses the very base line it claims to champion:

> Writing may portray, but cannot *constitute*, the intersubjective exchanges in which meanings are created and firmed. Socrates was right: reading is not enough. If we want to approach the harder wisdom we must talk and, of course, listen. (D. Davidson 1994), 432 (my emphasis).

Among its many merits, dialogue both reflects and generates what it constitutes, namely our very existence as thinkers, each of whom can flourish only as *one-among-others*. Notwithstanding the temptation to be diverted into cognitive science and brain theory, on the one hand, and the deceptively soft realms of spirituality and subjectivity, on the other, it is our everyday role as speakers, listeners and interpreters of one another that remains at the heart of who we are, as rational and reflective agents, and as teachers and students. Philosophers and educators may speak of the pursuit of wisdom; indeed, they should, since it seems that few others are inclined to. So it seems apt to close with these words from Davidson, once again: "If we want to approach the harder wisdom we must talk and, of course, listen."

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