

A Virtue Semantics¹

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose a virtue-theoretic approach to semantics, according to which the study of linguistic competence in particular, and the study of meaning and language in general, should focus on a speaker's interpretative virtues, such as charity and interpretability, rather than the speaker's knowledge of rules. The first part of the paper proffers an argument for shifting to virtue semantics, and the second part outlines the nature of such virtue semantics.

Since Donald Davidson (1986) published his paper, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (hereafter NDE), it has been discussed from a variety of viewpoints in a number of journal articles (as well as book chapters and dissertations). In my view, NDE encapsulates Davidson's later philosophy of language (see in particular Davidson 1984, 1989, 1993), including his views on the nature of linguistic competence, linguistic communication, and language, and the task of a formal theory of meaning. Most reviewers of NDE dedicate themselves to criticism (e.g., Dummett 1986, 1994; Bar-On and Risjord 1992), although some express their support (e.g. Ramberg 1989; Rorty 1998). Elsewhere, I have gone beyond a basic critique and argued instead that a new, virtue-theoretic approach to the study of meaning and language can be extracted from Davidson's later philosophy of language (Tsai 2006). To complete the picture of virtue semantics, in this paper I shall proffer a version of virtue semantics.

The first part of the paper is a summary of the argument for shifting to virtue semantics. Because this summary covers more than what is currently expressed in the literature, it is rather lengthy. In the second part of the paper, I outline a virtue semantics by exploring the components, varieties and structure of interpretative virtues.

1. Knowledge of Language, the Humpty Dumpty Problem, and a Virtue-Semantic Solution

The main target of Davidson's NDE is the meaning-theoretic account of linguistic competence, according to which linguistic competence *requires* knowledge of a for-

¹ I am deeply grateful to Prof. Cheng-hung Lin for his support and supervision of my Ph.D. thesis from which this paper is derived, and to Dr. Barry C. Smith for his teaching and encouragement during my studies at Birkbeck College London. I am also grateful to two anonymous referees for constructive comments that improved this article substantially.

mal semantic theory. Philosophers of language who subscribe to such an account have two main tasks: first, to construct an articulated, correct meaning-theory for a natural language, and second, to give an account of the epistemic/cognitive relation mediated between the contents of the meaning-theory and the competence of a speaker of that language. That is to say, these philosophers have to proffer not only a formal semantics, but also an epistemology of language. We can see that epistemologists of language like Michael Dummett (1991), Noam Chomsky (1986), Gareth Evans (1981), Martin Davies (1987, 1989), and Christopher Peacocke (1986, 1989) have struggled to tell us in what knowledge of language consists, although their models of knowledge of language are quite divergent and even in opposition at the methodological level.

Davidson's view on the meaning-theoretic account of linguistic competence is clear in his reply to the objections to NDE:

[L]et's look at the concept of a language I opposed. It was this: in learning a language, a person acquires the ability to operate in accord with a precise and specifiable set of syntactic and semantic rules; verbal communication depends on speaker and hearer sharing such an ability, and it requires no more than this. I argued that sharing such a previous mastered ability was neither necessary nor sufficient for successful linguistic communication. (Davidson 1994: 110)

I call this the Dispensability Thesis, according to which “knowledge of [a formal semantic] theory is neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding a speaker” (Davidson 1999: 598). Davidson emphasises this thesis in several replies to his critics and interpreters (Davidson 1993, 1994, 1998, 1999). We must note that the thesis does not claim that we should abandon the study of formal semantic theories, but only that the *knowledge* proffered by a formal semantic theory is neither necessary nor sufficient for linguistic competence and communication.

In order to understand the thesis, I have suggested that we can conceive language mastery as an ability to interpret or communicate with others. It is because a speaker's linguistic competence, i.e., an ability *to know meanings of every (actual or potential) sentence of a language*, can be rephrased as being able *to interpret every (actual or potential) sentence uttered by a speaker of that language*. Thus the question that whether a speaker's knowledge of a formal semantic theory is a necessary or sufficient condition for linguistic competence can be rephrased to whether a speaker's knowledge of a formal semantic theory (which is shared by both communicators in advance) is a necessary or sufficient condition for him to interpret or communicate with another speaker. In this regard, Davidson invites us to consider the phenomenon of malapropism. The moral of this consideration can be stated as follows: Knowledge of a formal semantic theory is not *sufficient* for understanding a speaker, since it is possible that an interpreter possesses the very knowledge (e.g. knowledge of the meaning-theory for English), while he still does not understand a speaker's utterances (e.g. Mrs. Malaprop's utterance “That is a nice derangement of epitaphs”). Further, sharing knowledge of a formal semantic theory in advance, i.e., having conventions or regularities, is not *necessary* for understanding a speaker, since an interpreter is capable of understanding or interpreting a speaker without conventions or sharing knowledge of a meaning-theory with his *interpretee* (i.e., an interpreter is capable of assigning meanings, say, *arrangement* and *epithet* to the words “derangement” and “epitaph” respectively—the very assignment is different from the one that the interpreter prepared in advance).

Several philosophers suspect that Davidson's position in NDE, where Davidson concludes that "there is no such thing as a language" (1986: 107), conflicts with his programme of truth-conditional semantics proposed in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. They see a conflict between two Davidsons: the early/Tarskian Davidson and the later/Wittgensteinian Davidson. Nonetheless, this conflict, even if it does exist, does not imply that the later Davidson is wrong, but that the two cannot both be right. In fact, in a video interview with Mark Sainsbury, Davidson discards his old belief about the role of a theory of meaning (the passage below is quoted from summaries of the transcriptions written by Michael Rara):

Davidson notes that his intention in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" was, in part, to show how a theory of [a Tarski-style] can be modified so that we can interpret other people... Davidson agrees...that it is a consequence of what he says in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" that our linguistic skills by themselves are not sufficient for interpretation. In understanding someone, Davidson contends, we may call on almost anything we know; and we will certainly call on more than what we can learn by the methods outlined in his paper "Radical Interpretation". This leads Davidson to concede that **he was, strictly, wrong to hold that a theory of meaning was something knowledge of which suffices for interpretation**. Instead, given what he says in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", he should take a theory of meaning to be something which produces something knowledge of which, *together with contextual features and general knowledge*, suffices for interpretation. Davidson notes that **even with this revised conception of a theory of meaning, no two speakers will have the same one**, since no two speakers will have the same expectations with respect to the behavior of others. (Davidson 1997: 48; boldface emphasis mine)

Here the problem that Davidson left unanswered, if any, is the role of formal semantics, rather than the nature of linguistic competence. Furthermore, the passage shows that Davidson would disapprove of the programme that assumes a speaker's (prior) knowledge of a pragmatics as constituting the speaker's ability to understand what other speakers mean and implicate in context.

If the meaning-theoretic account of linguistic competence is incorrect, a natural retort is to ask: What, then, is the *condition* of linguistic competence; what does linguistic competence *require*? Davidson has suggested that linguistic competence is an ability to converge on passing theories (Davidson calls the theory that an interpreter prepares in advance to interpret his speaker, the *prior theory*, and the theory that the interpreter *does* in fact use, the *passing theory*), and there is no rule on how to reach a passing theory. I label this view the *non-rule-governed account of linguistic competence*, which can be described as follows:

We may say that linguistic ability is the ability to converge on a passing theory from time to time... [T]here are no rules for arriving at passing theories, no rules in any strict sense, as opposed to rough maxims and methodological generalities. ...There is no more chance of regularizing, or teaching, this process than there is of regularizing or teaching the process of creating new theories to cope with new data in any field—for that is what this process involves. (Davidson 1986: 107; 1998: 327; see also Davidson 1984: 279)

This account is a species of the non-rule-based theories of meaning and language, a family of theories that ascribe no constitutive role to linguistic rules in the explanations of meaning, language mastery, linguistic communication, and the nature of language. What I call “virtue semantics” emerges from the critique of Davidson’s account of linguistic competence.

If linguistic competence is not rule-constitutive, why can a speaker not adopt Humpty Dumpty’s theory of meaning, which states: “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean”? We can treat this kind of theory as any idiolect-user’s underlying theory of meaning that he implicitly uses. The Humpty-Dumptyian theory of meaning does not violate the Dispensability Thesis, since the theory does not ask speakers have *prior* knowledge of a semantic theory in communication. A difficulty naturally arises for *us* (rather than for Humpty Dumpty): we cannot understand sentences uttered by Humpty Dumpty. No matter how hard we try in positing varieties of communicative hypotheses for Humpty Dumpty’s linguistic behaviour, in the end we still cannot confirm the hypotheses and then fail to understand what Humpty Dumpty means by what he says. How could a philosopher of language account for (evade, describe, explain, or whatever) our inability to interpret, or communicate with, Humpty Dumpty? I call this the *Humpty Dumpty Problem*.

Critics might respond that the case of Humpty Dumpty should be excluded from our discussion, since it does not constitute a case of successful communication, whereas the case of Mrs. Malaprop does (for we *actually* understand Mrs. Malaprop). These critics would argue that we must distinguish the question of what makes communication possible and the question of how to communicate successfully. Although one can study how to improve Humpty Dumpty’s communicative skill, as the second question proposes, philosophers are primarily concerned with answering the first question. Only cases of normal speakers or speakers like Mrs. Malaprop can serve our philosophical purposes; it is unintelligible to explore the conditions for communication through a study of Humpty Dumpty, who is completely *uninterpretable*.

Two remarks. First, why could we not merely treat Humpty Dumpty as a native speaker in imaginative scenarios such as radical translation or interpretation? By this I mean that we need not presuppose an actualised successful communication, and merely focus on the question of the conditions required in order to understand what Humpty Dumpty means by what he says. Second, at first glance, there appears to be no significant difference between Humpty Dumpty and Mrs. Malaprop: both *behave* or *act* as an idiolect-user, that is, from an observer’s point of view, the words they use to mean just what they choose them to mean (for example, Mrs. Malaprop uses “That’s a nice derangement of epitaphs” to mean *That’s a nice arrangement of epithets*, and Humpty Dumpty uses “That’s glory for you” to mean *That’s a nice knockdown argument for you*); no matter whether they detect the underlying (Humpty-Dumptyian) theory that governs their linguistic behaviour or not. By these remarks, I do not think we can exclude Humpty Dumpty from the case of successful communication simply based on the *fact* that he cannot communicate with others. Thus again, how can philosophers account for an idiolect-user like Humpty Dumpty whose idiolect is difficult and even impossible to grasp?

I think Davidson’s non-rule-governed account of linguistic competence cannot satisfactorily deal with the Humpty-Dumptyian phenomenon. According to the core of the account, “the ability to communicate by speech consists in the ability to make oneself understood, and to understand” (Davidson 1986: 106). Let us call this the *thin account*

of *linguistic competence* (which is absorbed in the non-rule-governed account). This characterisation of linguistic ability, in my view, has two flaws. First, the account of linguistic competence, as Davidson himself puts it, “is so nearly *circular* that it cannot be wrong” (Davidson 1986: 106; my italics). A circular explanation may be logically correct, but is always theoretically vicious *per se*. Second, the account makes linguistic competence too “thin”, by which I mean that the concept of linguistic competence, so characterised, tells us nothing about *how it is possible* to make oneself understood, and to understand. Let us just put these flaws aside for a moment and consider a hypothetical situation. Suppose we do have the ability to converge on a passing theory from time to time, and so does Humpty Dumpty. He probably already has, otherwise he would not have been able to understand, let alone answer, Alice's statement: “I don't know what you mean by ‘glory’”. In such a situation, it is still quite conceivable that we would not be able to understand Humpty Dumpty. He can use words in his Humpty-Dumpty way without informing us what he chooses the words to mean. In this case, we must ask what is still lacking that would constitute successful communication between Humpty Dumpty and us. Davidson's accounts of linguistic competence do not cover this question.

In light of the failure of rule-based theories (in particular the meaning-theoretic account of linguistic competence) and the insufficiency of Davidson's non-rule-based theory, I propose a virtue semantics as an alternative. The notion of virtue enters our discussion when we consider the cases of Mrs. Malaprop, Humpty Dumpty, and James Joyce. In Tsai (2006), I separate and identify these language users by their enduring *character*, or what I call “interpretative virtues” (I shall return to this notion in the next section). The three figures are *creative* language users—they make their “language” new to their listeners, but they are nevertheless of different types. Mrs. Malaprop and James Joyce—though the former is a lousy language user, while the latter is good at playing language (in an ordinary sense)—always make themselves *understandable* or *interpretable*; that is, they allow their interpretees to understand and interpret what they mean by what they say. On the contrary, Humpty Dumpty is neither understandable nor interpretable. Without delving deeper into to a speaker's nature, there is no way to make a distinction between the “linguistic competence” possessed by Mrs. Malaprop and James Joyce on the one hand, and by Humpty Dumpty on the other.

I do not reject Davidson's non-rule-governed account of linguistic competence; on the contrary, I intend to absorb it into the virtue-semantic framework. My complaint about the account is that it does not tell us what linguistic competence consists in. Furthermore, my study of the Humpty-Dumpty phenomenon explores and makes up for the deficiency of Davidson's account: In his account, a speaker's ability to understand all (actual and potential) utterances is explained through an idiolect-user's non-rule-governed knowledge of language and general knowledge of the world (that assist the idiolect-user to converge on interpretatively passing theories). But once the interpretative theories can be constructed in a non-rule-governed manner, it is possible to construct them in an “anything goes” manner. (The Humpty Dumpty phenomenon is so created.) To dispel this possibility, I explore the basis that underlies the formation of the knowledge, and accordingly explain (away) the Humpty-Dumpty phenomenon. For me, virtue semantics can be seen as a framework that organises *linguistic competence* (that is defined as an ability to know meanings of every actual and potential utterance of a speaker), *knowledge of language* (that is non-rule-constitutive in na-

ture), and *interpretative virtues* in a somewhat hierarchical fashion: first, a speaker's linguistic competence is explained as consisting in having non-rule-constitutive knowledge of language and the world, and second, the formation of such knowledge is motivated, guided, and justified by the speaker's good emotion for successful communication (i.e., the motivational component of an interpretative virtue).

There is much to address about my argument for shifting to virtue semantics. For example, some might question the adequacy of conceiving or defining (at the descriptive level) linguistic competence as communicative competence, as what I did in elucidating Davidson's Dispensability Thesis: does this re-description confuse linguistic competence with linguistic performance, or semantics with pragmatics? (I think the response involves the issues of the boundary of semantics and pragmatics, and of Davidson's reasons for replacing the concept of literal meaning with the concept of first meaning.) How would Davidson deal with the Humpty Dumpty Problem in his later philosophy of language? (As to how Davidson sees the Humpty-Dumpty theory of meaning, see Davidson 1989, 1994 [esp. pp. 121-2], and Tsai 2006 [esp. pp. 690-3].) I will leave these questions aside and ask how to construct a virtue-semantic framework for the study of language.

2. The Components of an Interpretative Virtue

The virtue-theoretic approach to philosophy is mainly exemplified in the field of ethics (the contemporary revival of virtue ethics was due to Elizabeth Anscombe's famous essay "Modern Moral Philosophy" 1958), and since 1980s, in the field of epistemology. The classical view on the nature of virtue theory is that it is an agent-based, or trait theory. However, this view has been challenged since the rise of virtue epistemology (in particular in Ernest Sosa's version). For years, there has been a debate about how to construe the notion of virtue within the field of virtue epistemology: one camp proposes an Aristotelian construal of virtue (e.g. Code 1987; Montmarquet 1994; Zagzebski 1996), and the other the reliabilist construal (e.g. Sosa 1991; Goldman 1992; Greco 2000). The former is usually called *virtue responsibilism*, and the latter *virtue reliabilism* (see e.g. Axtell 1997). Virtue semantics, as a species of virtue theory, needs a theory of virtue as its meta-theory, telling us what the nature of interpretative virtue is. As to this point, I shall apply (with slight modification) Linda Zagzebski's general account of virtue to characterise interpretative virtues (as Zagzebski says, her definition of virtue in general is broad enough to account for not only intellectual virtues, but also moral, aesthetic, and religious virtues; see Zagzebski 1996: 137). Since my concern is Zagzebski's theory of virtue in general, I will put aside the difficulties that arise from her applications of such a pure theory of virtue, such as modelling (virtue) epistemology upon (virtue) ethics, or delineating the relation between ethics and epistemology.

According to Zagzebski, a virtue has both a *motivational* and a *success* component. As to the first component, Zagzebski defines the term "motivation" as "a persistent tendency to be moved by a motive of a certain kind" (1996: 132, emphasis omitted) or "a disposition to have a motive" (1996: 137), and the term "motive", which appears in the above definition as "emotion or feeling that initiates and directs action towards an end" (1996: 131, emphasis omitted). That is to say, a virtue can be understood, due to its motivational component, as a disposition to have an action-directing emotion with a certain end. The second component relates to the first. A virtue *V* has an end, because *V* has a motivational component. A virtuous person with *V* desires to produce the end.

Zagzebski claims that “[v]irtue possession *requires* reliable success in attaining the ends of the motivational component of the virtue” (1996: 134, emphasis mine); it is because “**we generally think** that it is not sufficient to merely *have* the aims in order to be virtuous, but that a virtuous person reliably produces the ends of the virtue in question” (1996: 99, boldface emphasis mine). We can call this the *argument from inconceivability* for the constraint that a virtue requires the success component.

Some philosophers (e.g. Alston 2000; Driver 2000) cast doubt on the success component of virtue. For example, Alston posts his objection as follows:

Another problem with the account of virtue is that Zagzebski takes ‘virtue’ to be a success term. “A person does not have a virtue unless she is reliable at bringing about the end that is the aim of the motivational component of the virtue.” ([Zagzebski 1996:] 136) This thesis has the startling consequence that a person who would give freely of her resources if she had more than is required to sustain life cannot be termed ‘generous’, and a person who is sincerely devoted to helping others but is so inept as to more frequently harm rather than help the intended targets could not be termed ‘kind’ or ‘compassionate’. Yet surely we would describe this latter sort of person as “kind, well meaning, well intentioned, but ineffective or inept”... There are, no doubt, some virtues that carry a reliability constraint. One who is strongly motivated to moderate his consumption of food and drink but rarely succeeds in doing so could not be termed ‘temperate’. But this implication does not attach to all virtues. (Alston 2000: 186)

In this passage, Alston gives us three examples:

(A) A person who would give freely of her resources if she had more than is required to sustain life cannot be termed “generous”.

(B) A person who is sincerely devoted to helping others but is so inept as to more frequently harm rather than help the intended targets could not be termed “kind”.

(C) A person who is strongly motivated to moderate his consumption of food and drink but rarely succeeds in doing so could not be termed “temperate”.

Alston admits (C) but rejects (A) and (B). He thinks that the persons situated in (A) and (B) could be termed generous and compassionate respectively—although both persons fail to succeed in bringing about the specific end of the motivational component of the virtue in question. But what is Alston's reason for rejecting (A) and (B)? In effect, he did not address (A) further, and with respect to (B) only tells us that “surely we would describe this...sort of person as ‘kind, well meaning, well intentioned, but ineffective or inept’”. However, my objection to Alston goes beyond this shortage of explanation of why or how (A) and (B) are false. My objection lies in the observation that (A) and (B) are *irrelevant* to the argument from inconceivability. A suitable counter-example should be formed to accommodate the conception of a person who is entitled to be virtuous while not reliably successful in attaining the end of the motivational component of the virtue in question. However, neither (A) nor (B) is formed in the above way. I would like to reformulate Alston's (A) and (B) as follows:

(A') A person who is strongly motivated to freely give her resources if she has anything to give but rarely succeeds in doing so could not be termed "generous".

(B') A person who is strongly motivated to sincerely help others but rarely succeeds in doing so could not be termed "kind".

Further, I think that Alston's formulations of (A) and (B) are misleading. In forming (A), he confuses the *condition of exercising virtue* with the *element of constituting virtue*. The person in (A) is situated in a bad situation, a situation that does not constitute a precondition for exercising virtue. To say that a person who has nothing to give does not have virtue of generosity would be like to say that a fish that is situated without the liquid does not know how to swim, or that a cube of sugar that is put on the table is not water-soluble. The trouble in the case of sugar is that the experimental condition is not satisfied; the trouble the person situated in (A) faces is that the condition of exercising generosity is not met. In forming (B), Alston confuses the *method* of achieving the end of the motivational component with the *achievement* of the end.

So far I have defended Zagzebski's account that a virtue has both a motivational and a success component. Interpretative virtues share the nature of virtue delineated above. That is, an interpretative virtue has a motivational and a success component. The motivational component of an interpretative virtue is the disposition to be moved by the motive for successful communication, and the success component of the interpretative virtue requires an agent who possesses the virtue to reliably succeed in attaining communication (so construed, an interpretatively virtuous agent had better be able to read the mind of others, guess what a person is thinking or feeling in a particular situation, and so on). I propose to define an interpretative virtue as *a stable disposition of the mind that originates from the general motivation for linguistic communication and reliable success in attaining the ends of these motives*. After exploring the nature of interpretative virtues in general, I shall show which interpretative virtues a speaker should and might possess and how the virtues are related for a speaker to understand people and to be understood.

3. The Varieties and Structure of Interpretative Virtues

Although a communicative principle, as I shall call it, such as Davidson's principle of charity and Grice's cooperative principle, does not constitute linguistic competence, it nevertheless provides a useful resource for forming interpretative virtues. (Of course philosophers such as Davidson and Grice do not have any intention to accomplish what I set out do in this section, namely transforming varieties of communicative principles into interpretative virtues, nor do I intend to press them to do so.) Let me take Grice's case for example.

As is well known, the cooperative principle states: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975: 26). The principle can be specified by conversational maxims (and sub-maxims), which can be classified into four categories: maxims of quantities, maxims of qualities, maxims of relation, and maxims of manner. I list them as follows:

(M1) [No super-maxim is offered.]

(M1-1) Make your contribution as informative as required.

- (M1-2) Do not make your contribution more informative than required.
- (M2) *Try to make your contribution one that is true.*
 - (M2-1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - (M2-2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- (M3) *Be relevant.*
- (M4) *Be perspicuous.*
 - (M4-1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - (M4-2) Avoid ambiguity.
 - (M4-3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - (M4-4) Be orderly.

I intend to transform Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims in two stages: first, by applying the principle and maxims mainly to the scenarios of radical translation or interpretation; second, by treating them further as interpretative virtues, rather than principles or maxims. Grice sets the cooperative principle and conversational maxims as guidelines on ordinary conversations, but he also thinks that they can be applied to a more general case—they “have analogues in the sphere of transactions that are not talk exchanges” (Grice 1975: 28). In any case, let us suppose that the cooperative principle and conversational maxims aim for radical interpretation. Thus, in radical interpretation, an interpreter not only observes Davidson's principle of charity, but also the “Gricean” (if preferred to “Grice's”) cooperative principle and conversational maxims.

The second stage of my transformation is to treat the Gricean cooperative principle and super-maxims as interpretative virtues of speakers, and to treat the sub-maxims as what the speakers who possess those interpretative virtues will do in communication. We need such a transformation, since, from a virtue-semantic point of view, a speaker's linguistic and communicative competence does not *consist in* following—tacitly, explicitly, or whatever—any principles or maxims. Rather, the *content* of the cooperative principle and conversational super-maxims do state what a virtuous speaker is. Once the two stages of transformation are completed, the list of interpretative virtues can be formed as follows:

- (V1) *Be informative.*
 - Make your contribution as informative as required.
 - Do not make your contribution more informative than required.
- (V2) *Be sincere.*
 - Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- (V3) *Be relevant.*
- (V4) *Be perspicuous.*
 - Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - Avoid ambiguity.
 - Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - Be orderly.

So construed, a *sincere* speaker will not say what he believes to be false, and will not say that for which he lacks adequate evidence. An *informative* speaker will make his contribution as informative as, but not more informative than, required. In contrast, prejudice and stubbornness are interpretative vices; they make interpretation or communication difficult even to begin. We can imagine a scenario in which we as human beings and informative speakers are trying to teach a Martian, who does not know any

English, what “rabbit” means. When a rabbit appears in front of both the Martian and us, we as radical *speakers* point to the rabbit and utter “Rabbit!” In such a situation, we as *virtuous* speakers had better not utter sentences like “See, there is a *white* rabbit!” or “See, that is a long-eared, short-tailed, lagomorph mammal with long hind legs!” The two sentences encapsulate more information than required—too much information will confuse the Martian; worse, this will make it hard for the Martian to form *analytic hypotheses* (in a Quinean sense; cf. Quine 1960).

Examples of interpretative virtues are not hard to find: they can be formed either by our positing according to our own interest, or by transforming from various principles, rules, or maxims that we can find in literature, similar to what I did with Grice's theory. After obtaining various interpretative virtues, a more crucial issue is to arrange them in a hierarchy.

(A side note: Some interpretative virtues are *interpreter's* virtues, and some are *speaker's* [or *interpretee's*] virtues. For example, for a language-user *qua* interpreter or listener, his interpretative virtue is to be charitable, patient, respectable, and so on. For a language-user *qua* interpretee or speaker, his interpretative virtue is to be interpretable, informative, sincere, relevant, perspicuous, and so on.)

Among interpretative virtues, I treat the virtues of charity and interpretability as *primary* or *cardinal* virtues. By “charity” I mean that an interpreter has a tendency to believe that his interpretee's utterances and beliefs are true. By “interpretability” I mean that an interpretee has a tendency to make himself as understandable as possible; for example, he has a tendency to connect his linguistic tokens and overt behaviour in a certain systematic or regular way. These are the fundamental traits of a language-user, which constitute communicability.

The *secondary* virtues are traits derived from the primary virtues, such as the virtues of cooperation, sincerity, relevance, and so forth. The secondary virtues are important, because the cardinal virtues, although fundamental, are vacant or vague in theory; we need more assistance to achieve the virtues of charity and interpretability. For example, to be interpretable, we advise a speaker to be cooperative, and then to be (interpretatively) informative, sincere, relevant, perspicuous, and so on.

The *auxiliary* virtues are the traits a language-user employs to converge on passing theories. The auxiliary virtues, in my opinion, are mostly intellectual in nature. This is because the way to construct and test communicative hypotheses in conversation is just like the way to construct and test scientific hypotheses about the external world. As Davidson says:

We may say that linguistic ability is the ability to converge on a passing theory from time to time—this is what I have suggested, and I have no better proposal. But if we do say this, then we should realize that we have abandoned not only the ordinary notion of a language, but we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally. (Davidson 1986: 107)

So construed, a virtuous speaker had better also be a virtuous knower; one who is apt, open-minded, prudent, etc.

The following is a rough list of three types of interpretative virtues, although the list is not exhaustive. Further, I do not think it is a necessary task for virtue semantics to provide a complete list of interpretative virtues.

- (A) Primary virtues
 - Be charitable* (the virtue of charity).
 - Be interpretable* (the virtue of interpretability).
- (B) Secondary virtues
 - Be cooperative* (the virtue of cooperation).
 - Be informative* (the virtue of informativeness).
 - Be sincere* (the virtue of sincerity).
 - Be relevant* (the virtue of relevance).
 - Be perspicuous* (the virtue of perspicuity).
- (C) Auxiliary virtues
 - Be apt* (the virtue of aptness).
 - Be open-minded* (the virtue of open-mindedness).
 - Be prudent* (the virtue of prudence).

It is worthwhile to note several additional points. First, I omitted a crucial interpretative virtue from the list above: the *virtue of impartation*. This term refers to the tendency to be willing to exchange ideas with others, to be understood. The reason why the very virtue is not mentioned separately is that it is part of all the other interpretative virtues. This is because the notion of “interpretative virtue” has a motivational component, namely motivation for exchanging ideas with each other. The virtues of charity, interpretability, informativeness, and sincerity all presuppose the virtue of impartation, so there is no need to isolate and highlight this virtue. Second, we should not confuse interpretative virtues with ethical virtues. Telling a lie, even if it might be morally vicious, requires the possession of interpretative virtues, because a lie requires to be understood linguistically before it is believed as truth. Third, the interpretative virtues discussed above should be seen from a radical-interpretative point of view. That is, I am concerned with a set of fundamental virtues that would be sufficient for language-users to advance communication; the best way to deal with the issue is to appeal to a thought experiment like radical interpretation. I am not concerned with the sort of “interpretative virtues” that would assist interpreters or readers to achieve a *correct* or *objective* understanding of speakers or texts. Nor am I concerned with communicative *skills* designed to make communication fluent—neither of these factors has to do with the condition of communication. Fourth, virtue semantics does not aim to describe how a speaker develops or cultivates her or his interpretative virtues. The aim of virtue semantics is to explain what having or speaking a natural language requires.

4. Conclusion

Several philosophers recognise that a speaker *qua* agent plays an important role in the study of language; they highlight notions such as action, intention, motivation, and rationality. However, it seems that none of these philosophers have sought a purely *agent-based* theory of meaning. Moreover, in some cases, a speaker's integrity as agent is sliced into dimensional and timeless pieces. As opposed to these other theories, I have argued, through and beyond Davidson's NDE, that we should treat the enduring characters of a speaker, such as charity, sincerity, perspicuity, aptness, open-mindedness, prudence, and patience as central notions in the study of language.

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