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*Essays for David Wiggins: Identity, Truth and Value*

By Sabina Lovibond and S. G. Williams (eds)

Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996

This *festschrift* deserves a place on the shelves of every philosopher interested in the work of David Wiggins. It displays most impressively the sheer scale of his contribution to contemporary philosophy, not just in his own writing, but in the stature and the range of interests of those he has taught and worked alongside. The papers are good and varied, and they are accompanied by sixty pages of replies which give a deeper and clearer insight into Wiggins' current thinking than is available anywhere else. There is also a short intellectual autobiography in which the necessary play of chance and necessity in determining a philosophical career is richly evident, and a full list of publications. To give a sense of the book, I give a sentence or two to every paper. I discuss Cheryl Misak's paper and its reply in a bit more detail.

Timothy Williamson (Ch. 1) offers an original proof for the determinacy of distinctness, which Wiggins accepts. Harold Noonan (Ch. 2) presses Geach's arguments for relative identity against Wiggins' absolute conception, but Wiggins is unconvinced. Paul Snowdon (Ch. 3) argues that non-animal persons are conceivable, but in reply, Wiggins cautions that 'the fact that there are words to describe a putative set-up ... creates no presumption at all that the set-up is metaphysically possible or can be coherently envisaged' (p. 247). Stephen Williams (Ch. 4) explores semantic role and ambiguity. In reply Wiggins recommends an approach to semantics which integrates Tarski's emphasis on semantic structure with Aristotle's emphasis on word meaning (p. 252). Wilfrid Hodges (Ch. 8) begins with his impressions of Wiggins' way of doing philosophy. Precepts he singles out are: be ready to revise your question as you go; approach your question indirectly; keep a store of insoluble problems; and formalise (p. 148). He considers Wiggins' views on moral truth, drawing on Tarski, but in reply Wiggins notes that the account of truth he has in mind is not Tarski's but Frege's.

Sabina Lovibond (Ch. 5) explores an implication of the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge. To be the full author of moral expressions, we must master the concepts in upbringing. But the alterity of language described by Derrida persists—our language has a history independent of us, a use wider than we can grasp, and effects beyond our control. Lovibond then uses ideas of connivance and fictional reference from Gareth Evans to show how 'internally inchoate' agents may nevertheless participate in virtue. John McDowell (Ch. 6) argues that Aristotle took the motivational force of moral knowledge to be defensible for all but the per-

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flectly virtuous. McDowell's interpretation, as well as rehabilitating Aristotle's moral psychology, might also apply to the Socratic thesis, 'liberating it from the strange want of realism that much recent commentary has found in it' (p. 110). Roger Crisp (Ch. 8) offers three criteria—causal, discipline, and standpoint—to distinguish natural from non-natural properties. He favours the standpoint criterion, and interprets Wiggins as arguing that naturalism cannot account for the normativity of ethics, because it cannot accommodate our subjective responses in its picture of the world. Wiggins appreciates Crisp's efforts to sharpen the debate, but does not think the distinction can thus be captured, and rejects the idea of a split between cognition and affect.

Anthony Savile (Ch. 9) criticizes the 'constitutive' reading of Hume's aesthetics. Variations in interest, character (pp. 132–3), culture and era (pp. 133–4) undermine the idea that the judge's taste can constitute an objective standard. An 'evidential' conception of the standard, grounded in practice and comparison, avoids these difficulties, and was what Hume intended, Savile argues.

Adrian Moore (Ch. 10) interprets Wiggins' idea of there being 'nothing else to think, or want, or do' reflexively, as resulting from application to the self of standards of 'rational self-conscious reflection on its best explanation' (p. 172). Moore argues that there is 'nothing else' in Wiggins' sense for a rational agent acting on a Kantian categorical imperative. If you do not phi, you fail to be an agent at all (p. 174). Moore's view of the connection between rationality, agency and obligation has affinities with the view that Christine Korsgaard is developing in this year's John Locke lectures. Wiggins appreciates Moore's non-indexical and unqualified reading of 'nothing else'.

Edmund Hussey (Ch. 11) suggests that if we view Protagoras's concept of 'better opinion' through the lens of Wiggins' 'marks of truth', we will see how it might make robust pragmatic concepts of truth and knowledge available (p. 196). Wiggins wonders whether this pragmatist Protagorean knowledge might be analogous to Vico's 'maker knowledge' (p. 274).

Cheryl Misak (Ch. 12) rejects Quine's prejudice against ethics, and defends an even more radical holism than his. She argues that he cannot hold that the only evidence is sensory, and reject the analytic/synthetic distinction, and concludes that empiricism requires that there be two kinds of 'evidence', one sensory, the other involving 'proof, or evident rightness' (p. 206). Misak recommends the Peircean criterion of experience as that which forces belief upon one. The senses need not be involved. Philosophers writing about truth in ethics have explored two possible analogies, with empirical sensory judgments, and with mathematical judgments. But lack of organs and objects undermines the analogy with empirical judgments, and the lack of agreement undermines the analogy with maths. A better strategy for defending moral truth, Misak proposes, is to adopt the Peircean criterion and see if moral beliefs meet it. Many do: we see wrongness, and we find some reasons, arguments, examples and thought-experiments compelling (p. 211).

Wiggins welcomes Misak's invitation to explore analogies between empirical, mathematical and moral knowledge. But he is concerned that her incorporation of the ethical into a global holistic empiricism may undermine the distinctness of each sort of discourse and subject matter, which 'has its own intellectual aims and methods' (p. 277). To correct the misuse of a global standard for truth such as the empiricist standard, we can either say 1) that the discourse in question does meet it, as Misak argues; or 2) that the standard is faulty, and truth-directedness does not after all require it, which is the option Wiggins prefers. He then spells out what is involved in his commitment to the idea that empirical knowledge is relatively foundational: not Cartesian immunity from error; nor a pre-conceptual given; nor something to which basic sentences correspond. Rather, 'only the innocent idea that ... there has to be *relatively* direct knowledge... which can be supplied at need to other fields of inquiry ... presupposing *relatively* little and which we can avail ourselves of without being required to embark upon a potential infinity of antecedent precautionary routines' (p. 278).

I think Misak could argue that some moral claims have even Wiggins' new marks of empirical truth, being i) relatively non-committal about collateral information; ii) relatively reliable; iii) relatively less at the mercy of interfering or defeating factors, and less controversial. (Think of assertions concerning paradigm instances of core moral concepts.) On this view, our 'foundations' are the concepts with which we are most familiar and hence most confident. Some may be 'empirical' ('this is a cat'); but some will be ethical ('that is cruel') and some aesthetic ('this prose is leaden'). Such 'foundations' will have all the relative independence that Wiggins seems to want to reserve for empirical concepts. Independence comes not from the natural salience of certain objects, but from how finely honed the skill is amongst us of picking just those things out.

**Soran Reader**

*Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*

By Donald Davidson

Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. xviii + 237. ISBN 0-19-823752-9

This is the third volume in the series of Donald Davidson's collected essays, the first and second of which originally appeared many years ago under the titles *Essays on Actions and Events* (1980) and *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (1984) and the fourth and fifth of which are due to appear soon under the titles *Problems of Rationality* and *Truth, Language, and History*. The contents of all five volumes are usefully listed at the end of this one. Since Davidson, while being a remarkably wide-ranging and systematic philosopher, has nowhere gathered his thoughts into a single book but has only issued them piecemeal in numerous papers, these five volumes will together constitute the definitive resource for those concerned to ascertain precisely what his views are and how they have developed over the years.

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The fourteen essays in the volume currently under review, dating from 1982 to 1998, focus on three connected sets of issues, concerning three interrelated kinds of knowledge: self-knowledge, knowledge of other people's minds, and knowledge of the world around us. That these three kinds of knowledge are interrelated, and indeed necessarily so, is one of Davidson's main claims, which informs and pervades the whole volume (but see, especially, Essay 14, 'Three Varieties of Knowledge' (1991)). Davidson considers that each of us has a special kind of authority with respect to the contents of our own thoughts, which we do not have with respect to the contents of other people's thoughts (see Essay 1, 'First Person Authority' (1984) and Essay 2, 'Knowing One's Own Mind' (1987)). This is because, in order to know the thoughts of others, we must interpret their linguistic behaviour and such interpretation is fallible, although not massively so. We cannot, he thinks, be fallible in this way with respect to the contents of our own thoughts—but not because those contents are somehow immediately and luminously present to our minds (see Essay 3, 'The Myth of the Subjective' (1988) and Essay 4, 'What is Present to the Mind?' (1989)). Rather, whereas interpreting the thoughts of other people requires us to match sentences of their languages with sentences of our own, in our own case we can do no better to capture the contents of our thoughts than to use the very sentences by which we ourselves are wont to express them. At the same time, Davidson is emphatic that the contents of our own thoughts cannot provide a non-circular epistemological foundation for our knowledge of the world around us and our knowledge of other minds, in the way that many rationalist and empiricist philosophers have supposed (see Essay 6, 'The Irreducibility of the Concept of the Self' (1998)). In his view, we can assign contents to our own thoughts only because we are social beings, sharing some linguistic means of communicating our thoughts with other creatures who together with us inhabit a common world of objects and events (see Essay 7, 'Rational Animals' (1982) and Essay 8, 'The Second Person' (1992)). Here Davidson's favourite metaphor—drawn from the language of surveying—is that of 'triangulation', with the landmark being surveyed representing some object or event in the world and the two different surveying points representing two different people with different cognitive perspectives on that object or event.

The metaphor of triangulation may not bear very much weight in itself, but it is meant to signal something like the following view of the essential relationships between oneself, the world, and other people. Objects and events in the world stand in causal relations to my thoughts and to the thoughts of other people, helping to confer upon those thoughts their particular contents (see Essay 9, 'The Emergence of Thought' (1997) and Essay 13, 'Epistemology Externalized' (1990)). I can interpret the speech and thereby the thought of another person only by identifying certain of its causal determinants as objects or events to which I myself can make reference in my own speech and which, hence, belong to the contents of certain of my own thoughts. Equally, however, only because I can interpret

the speech of another person as expressive of thoughts about the world that may or may not disagree with my own can I think of myself as a subject with thoughts about the world that may or may not be mistaken. To be a thinker, I must understand the distinction between how the world is and how it is thought to be—the distinction between reality and appearance. That is to say, I must possess the concept of truth. However, I cannot be supposed to discover this distinction by directly discovering any mismatch between my own thought and the world, for no sense can be made of my ‘comparing’ the world with how I think the world to be (see Essay 10, ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’ (1983) and Essay 11, ‘Empirical Content’ (1982)). Rather, I can discover the distinction only by discovering a mismatch between by own thought and that of someone else—and this requires me to be an interpreter of the thoughts of others and hence a social being possessed of language.

Because Davidson thinks that this is how oneself, the world and other people are and must be related, he thinks that scepticism about the ‘external world’ and scepticism about ‘other minds’ are both incoherent. He is opposed to antirealism and in that sense is a realist. However, he repudiates any doctrine of metaphysical realism couched in terms of truth as consisting in a ‘correspondence’ between language or thought and reality. This is because he considers that no sense can be made of truth as a relation between a truth-bearer—a sentence or thought—and some discrete part of reality—a ‘fact’ or ‘state of affairs’—which makes that truth-bearer true (see Essay 12, ‘Epistemology and Truth’ (1988)). Indeed, he regards the concept of truth as being primitive and indefinable. He seeks to steer a middle way between antirealists who treat the concept of truth as a wholly epistemic notion, equivalent perhaps to the notion of warranted assertability, and metaphysical realists, who treat the concept of truth as a wholly non-epistemic notion and thereby open the door to global scepticism. This is not the place to attempt an evaluation of Davidson’s complex and subtle views on all these matters. Suffice it to say that the present volume will repay careful reading and re-reading by anyone interested in the deep and difficult problems of philosophy with which he is here concerned.

If I were allowed to voice just one criticism of Davidson’s philosophical project as it emerges from these papers, it would be that he does not take ontology seriously. No doubt this is because he doesn’t think that ontology *can* be taken seriously, in the way that I have in mind. He subscribes to the Quinean thesis of the inscrutability of reference (see Essay 5, ‘Indeterminism and Antirealism’ (1997)) and is thereby committed to the Quinean doctrine of ontological relativity. He no more believes in a ‘ready-made world’ than does Hilary Putnam, despite eschewing Putnam’s ‘internal realism’, which is merely a form of antirealism born—in Davidson’s eyes—of an unduly epistemicist conception of truth. For Davidson, then, ‘the world’ is not constituted by objects bearing properties and standing in relations to one another quite independently of the language in which we attempt to describe it. Just as he repudiates ‘facts’, conceived as the supposed worldly correlates of true sentences or thoughts,

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so he repudiates 'properties' and 'relations', conceived as the supposed worldly correlates of predicates. At least by implication, he even repudiates 'objects', conceived as the supposed worldly correlates of singular terms. Of course, he allows that we can speak truly of objects and other particulars, notably events: we can quantify over them and describe them correctly or incorrectly by means of predicates. But, for Davidson, what we thus speak of are, in a sense, merely projections of our language rather than entities which our language must be shaped to fit if we are to speak truly. According to Davidson, reality or the world constrains our attempts to describe it truly only in a global and holistic fashion, by way of the rational requirement that those descriptions should all cohere with one another.

My reaction to this deflationary conception of ontology is that I see no good argument in favour of it and every reason to reject it as ultimately incoherent. Truth-maker realism does not, in fact, have to take the form of a correspondence theory of truth in the traditional sense. But, in any case, the sort of argument that Davidson relies on to repudiate the correspondence theory—a version of the so-called 'slingshot argument'—is now discredited. It is far from clear that an ontology of facts or states of affairs is untenable, as the work of David Armstrong has shown. Such an ontology treats objects, properties and relations with full metaphysical seriousness, rather than treating them as projections of grammatical categories. So do other realist ontologies which take tropes, or particularized properties, as the fundamental building blocks of reality and which are likewise committed to a version of the truth-maker principle. None of these ontologies is genuinely shaken by Quinean claims of the inscrutability of reference and ontological relativity, which have never been adequately argued for.

The idea that ontology is a projection of language falls apart, in the end, because it makes no sense to apply it to language and language-users themselves. Sentences, speakers, and the thoughts that they express by means of sentences are all parts of the world themselves. Any ontology, whether metaphysically realist or linguistically relativist, must accommodate such entities, since we who do ontology are thinkers and speakers. But we cannot coherently take ourselves, our thoughts, and our sentences to be mere projections of our language, on pain of circularity. Consequently, we must adopt metaphysical realism at least with respect to ourselves, our thoughts and our sentences. And having adopted this much metaphysical realism, we have no good reason to go no farther. For there is nothing special, ontologically speaking, about these items. We, our thoughts and our sentences are just objects or events of certain kinds, possessing certain properties and standing in various relations. If the world contains such entities independently of our attempts to describe it, then there is no reason why it shouldn't contain other entities belonging to the same ontological categories—other kinds of objects, events, properties and relations—equally independently of our attempts to describe it. The door to metaphysical realism cannot be kept closed, but once it is open there is nothing to stop it from opening completely.

**E. J. Lowe**

*Facing Facts*<sup>1</sup>

By Stephen Neale

Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. xv + 254. £25

As Stephen Neale explains (p. 9), a slingshot argument is a collapsing argument designed to demonstrate that there are fewer entities of a given kind than might be supposed previously. Neale's rigorous, scholarly and technically impressive monograph, based largely on two earlier articles,<sup>2</sup> is a sustained examination of the merits of those slingshots whose target is an ontology of facts. Such arguments, which have been infamously propounded by Gödel, Church, Quine and Davidson, purport to show that theories of facts are untenable because there could be at most only one such item.

The main thesis of Neale's book can be put like this. Although those slingshots offered up to now can be countered by fact-theorists relatively easily, a more exacting slingshot, derived from that of Gödel, establishes that any theory of facts must meet the substantive 'descriptive constraint' (pp. 185–7), if it is to avoid ontological collapse. Neale also contends that his favoured slingshot both demands that theorists of facts 'say something very precise (if only disjunctively) about the semantics of definite descriptions' (p. 13), and provides 'indirect support' for Russell's theory thereof (p. 13). I shall return to these claims in due course. Let me start, however, by setting the scene.

A fact-theorist holds that connectives such 'the fact that ... = the fact that ...' (herewith, *FIC*), 'the sentence that ... corresponds to the fact that ...' (herewith, ©) and (if she takes facts to be causes) 'the fact that ... caused it to be the case that ...' are not truth-functional. If they were, it would follow, respectively, that there is only one fact, that all true propositions correspond to the same fact, and that all facts are causally related. Slingshot arguments aim to show that this appearance of non-truth-functionality is illusory. A successful slingshot will reveal the connectives in question to permit the substitution of material equivalents *salva veritate* within their scope. Having said this, it would not be wholly unfair to say that most commentators with a sensitive nose have detected a whiff of sophistry about the slingshot arguments proffered by Church, Quine and Davidson. In Chapters 2–5 and 8, Neale does an excellent job of laying bare the way in which the three authors' various slingshots are undermined by implausible premises and/or arguably mistaken applications of inference principles. In particular, Chapter 2 sees Neale elegantly explain how Davidson's slingshot relies upon both an assumption that a fact-

<sup>1</sup> In fairness to the reviewer and author, this review is being reprinted from *Philosophy* 78 (January 2003) due to several major typographical mistakes in the previous version.

<sup>2</sup> See 'The Philosophical Significance of Gödel's Slingshot', *Mind* 104 (1995), pp. 761–825, and (with Josh Dever) 'Slingshots and Boomerangs', *Mind* 106 (1977), pp. 143–68.

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theorist is likely to deny, and a dubious application of a substitution principle regarding singular terms.

Davidson's contested assumption is that logical equivalents may be substituted *salva veritate* within the scope of the relevant connectives; or, in other words, that the connectives in question permit the use of the following inference principle on any sentence within their scope:

$$\text{PSLE:} \quad \frac{\varphi \models \psi}{\Sigma(\varphi)} \Sigma(\psi).$$

Davidson's questionable application of an inference principle, meanwhile, is his use of the following principle of the substitutivity for singular terms for sentences containing definite descriptions:

$$\text{PSST:} \quad \frac{\alpha = \beta}{\Sigma(\alpha)} \Sigma(\beta).$$

With these two assumptions in place, we construct a characteristically Davidsonian slingshot (in which '⊗' takes the place of one of the fact-theorist's connectives, and '⊗+PSLE' means that the connective permits the use of PSLE on any sentence within its scope):

1	[1]	$\varphi$	Prem
2	[2]	$\psi$	Prem
3	[3]	$\otimes\varphi$	Prem
3	[4]	$\otimes(\iota x(x=d)=\iota x(x=d \bullet \varphi))$	3, $\otimes$ +PSLE
1,2,3	[5]	$\otimes(\iota x(x=d)=\iota x(x=d \bullet \psi))$	4, $\otimes$ +PSST
1,2,3	[6]	$\otimes\psi$ .	5, $\otimes$ +PSLE

Needless to say, if  $\otimes$  is +PSLE, and Davidson is entitled to his use of PSST, Davidson's slingshot hits its target. But as Neale lucidly explains, precisely these points are highly controversial. Neale notes (p. 221) that Barwise and Perry, Bennett and Searle have all disputed that the connectiveness in question are +PSLE, and with good reason: ' $\iota x(x=d)=\iota x(x=d \bullet \varphi)$ ' contains a singular term that does not occur in ' $\varphi$ ', and it is tempting to conclude from this that the two truths differ with respect to their truth-relevant entities, and hence express different facts. The appeal to PSST to licence the move from [4] to [5], meanwhile, presumes that the definite descriptions ' $\iota x(x=d \bullet \varphi)$ ' and ' $\iota x(x=d \bullet \psi)$ ' are genuine singular terms, and this presumption causes trouble. First, it is plainly contradicted by Russell's theory of descriptions. Second, even if definite descriptions *are* taken to be singular terms, Neale points out that it is by no means obvious that there is a plausible semantics available which generates the argument's claimed logical equivalences (p. 56). It would be interesting to hear Davidson's response to Neale's elegant unpicking of what remains, somewhat surprisingly, Davidson's leading argument against the correspondence theory of truth.



Granted that Davidson’s slingshot is unlikely to hit its target, how does Neale improve upon it? By taking his cue from Gödel. Neale replaces Davidson’s assumption concerning the substitutivity of logical equivalents with something less permissive, and uses an inference principle concerning definite descriptions, whether they are taken to be singular terms or not. Specifically, Neale replaces PSLE with the altogether less permissive  $\iota$ -CONV (pp. 177–80), and uses  $\iota$ -SUBS (pp. 157–65) in place of PSST:

$\iota$ -CONV:	$\frac{\Sigma(x/\alpha)}{\alpha = \iota x(x = \alpha \bullet \Sigma(x))}$	$\frac{\alpha = \iota x(x = \alpha \bullet \Sigma(x))}{\Sigma(x/\alpha)}$	
$\iota$ -SUBS:	$\frac{\iota x \phi = \iota x \psi}{\Sigma(\iota x \phi)}$	$\frac{\iota x \phi = \alpha}{\Sigma(\iota x \phi)}$	$\frac{\iota x \phi = \alpha}{\Sigma(\alpha)}$
	$\Sigma(\iota x \psi)$	$\Sigma(\alpha)$	$\Sigma(\iota x \phi).$

It should be noted that  $\iota$ -CONV does not license Davidson’s moves from [3] to [4], and from [5] to [6], whilst a Russellian about definite descriptions holds that substitutions involving definite descriptions can only be licensed by  $\iota$ -SUBS, and not by PSST.

With these differences in mind, we can follow Neale in formulating his Gödelian slingshot as follows (pp. 183–7):

1	[1]	Fa	Prem
2	[2]	a ≠ b	Prem
3	[3]	Gb	Prem
1	[4]	a = $\iota x(x = a \bullet Fx)$	1, $\iota$ -CONV
2	[5]	a = $\iota x(x = a \bullet x \neq b)$	2, $\iota$ -CONV
2	[6]	b = $\iota x(x = b \bullet x \neq a)$	2, $\iota$ -CONV
3	[7]	b = $\iota x(x = b \bullet Gx)$	3, $\iota$ -CONV
1,2	[8]	$\iota x(x = a \bullet Fx) = \iota x(x = a \bullet x \neq b)$	4, 5, $\iota$ -SUBS
2,3	[9]	$\iota x(x = b \bullet Gx) = \iota x(x = b \bullet x \neq a)$	6, 7, $\iota$ -SUBS
10	[10]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(Fa)$	Prem
10	[11]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(a = \iota x(x = a \bullet Fx))$	10, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -CONV
1,2,10	[12]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(a = \iota x(x = a \bullet x \neq b))$	11, 8, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -SUBS
1,2,10	[13]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(a \neq b)$	12, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -CONV
1,2,10	[14]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(b = \iota x(x = b \bullet x \neq a))$	13, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -CONV
1,2,3,10	[15]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(b = \iota x(x = b \bullet Gx))$	14, 9, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -SUBS
1,2,3,10	[16]	$\textcircled{\bullet}(Gb)$	15, $\textcircled{\bullet}\iota$ -CONV

One thing for sure: this argument is valid and so conclusively demonstrates the *descriptive constraint*: namely, that if ontological collapse is to be avoided, ‘[t]he friend of facts needs a theory according to which these connectives are either— $\iota$ -SUBS or— $\iota$ -CONV’ (p. 187). Neale’s main thesis has been proved and, what is more, his slingshot proceeds with strikingly weaker premises than that of Church, Quine and Davidson. As we shall see, however, what is less clear is the extent of this result’s philosophical importance.

Largely as a response to objections made by Graham Oppy to his original

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article,<sup>3</sup> Neale sets out to make the case for the proof's philosophical significance by doing two things. He carefully explains the proof's *point*, namely, that it 'imposes a *structural* constraint on theories of facts' (p. 210) which enables us to 'filter out theories of facts that are inconsistent' (p. 207); and he couples this with an enlightening account of how and why certain facts-theorists (notably Neil Wilson, J. L. Austin and, arguably, the early Wittgenstein) have come to assume the relevant connectives to be both +*t*-SUBS and +*t*-CONV, thus precipitating the aforementioned collapse (pp. 205–10). This, Neale claims, is sufficient to demonstrate the proof's clear philosophical bite (p. 210).

True enough, Neale has shown that his Gödelian slingshot has *some* philosophical significance. There is no doubt that any theorist of facts had better explain why the relevant connectives are  $\neg$ *t*-SUBS or  $\neg$ *t*-CONV. But it remains the case that it is all too easy for certain fact-theories to meet the descriptive constraint. Indeed, as Neale himself explains (p. 204), according to a Russellian theory, which takes facts to be structured entities with objects and properties as constituents, and which treats definite descriptions as quantified noun-phrases rather than singular terms, *FIC* comes out as *both*  $\neg$ *t*-SUBS and  $\neg$ *t*-CONV. This brings me on to my major reservation with the book, a reservation that first materialised as I realised that a work entitled *Facing Facts* was wholly concerned with slingshot arguments.

Let me lead up to my worry this way. Although a Russellian can neatly evade what is, undoubtedly, the best slingshot money can buy, he is clearly by no means home and dry. Indeed, he is certainly not entitled to claim the prize until he has done the following, at least: satisfactorily motivated his theory of facts (perhaps by means of saying why we should accept a truthmaker principle); explained why we should not simply follow Frege in identifying facts with true propositions; and justified the suggestion that facts are genuine causes. Indeed, until the Russellian has addressed these characteristically philosophical questions, his avoidance of the slingshot will cut no ice with a sceptic about facts. Neale, however, has very little to say about these less technical concerns, suggesting that a fact-theorist should simply proceed by examining whether a theory of facts can avoid his slingshot whilst doing justice to 'the semi-ordinary, semi-philosophical idea of what facts are' and permitting 'facts to do some philosophical work' (p. 223). But this approach surely constitutes an attempt to apply, in Gareth Evans's phrase, a metaphysical wet blanket to substantive issues. For there *is no* single semi-ordinary, semi-philosophical idea of the nature of facts, as a cursory examination of our ordinary language reveals.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 'The Philosophical Insignificance of Gödel's Slingshot', *Mind* 106 (1997), pp. 121–41.

<sup>4</sup> One example should suffice. On the one hand, as Neale explains (p. 48), we customarily describe facts as being *about*, rather than as *containing*, objects, which suggests that we view facts as true thoughts, rather than as things to which true thoughts correspond. But on the other hand, we describe thoughts, but not facts, as true, which seemingly embodies a resistance to this identity-thesis.

Likewise, there is a glorious lack of consensus on the ‘philosophical work’ that should be done by facts. Are facts needed to act as truthmakers, or could tropes do this job? Do truths need truthmakers at all? Can facts be causes, or is this job done solely by events, as Davidson believes? Could facts be causes and yet be true thoughts, as Bennett has suggested? If a fact-theorist cannot provide answers to these questions that satisfactorily motivate an ontology of facts in the first place, the issue of whether a given theory avoids the slingshot becomes little more than a technical side-show. As a consequence, I expected Neale to be a little more committal in these areas. Perhaps Chapter 11, in which he helpfully sets out some of the options, could have been extended and a little more decisive.

When it comes to Neale’s claim that his favoured slingshot provides indirect support for Russell’s theory of descriptions (p. 13), I found myself less than wholly convinced. Neale’s argument would seem to be this. The Russellian about definite descriptions can relatively easily avoid the slingshot’s conclusion because he is free to deny that *FIC* is *either* + $\iota$ -SUBS *or* + $\iota$ -CONV. For the Russellian,

*FIC* is not + $\iota$ -SUBS because two definite descriptions of the same object will not, in general, contribute the same descriptive properties to a fact. Secondly, the structured character of facts guarantees that [the connective] will not support  $\iota$ -CONV since the quantificational nature of descriptions introduces properties not present in the pre-*iota*-conversion fact. (p. 204)

By contrast, Neale suggests, things are not so straightforward for the fact-theorist who is inclined to regard definite descriptions as singular terms. If such a fact-theorist is to deny that *FIC* is + $\iota$ -CONV, he must provide a precise semantics for definite descriptions which has them as singular referring expressions, validates  $\iota$ -CONV in truth-functional contexts, and yet has  $\iota$ -CONV break down within *FIC*’s scope; and such a theory, Neale argues (Ch. 10), is not obviously to hand. Given that this is so, could the friend of facts who takes definite descriptions to be singular terms avoid ontological collapse by denying that *FIC* is + $\iota$ -SUBS? No, claims Neale. For if definite descriptions are singular terms, the question of whether *FIC* is + $\iota$ -SUBS becomes the question of whether it is +PSST; and this, Neale claims, is something which ‘no fact theorist who intends to get some metaphysical work out of facts wants to deny’ (p. 221).

In response to this, let us grant what Neale says about  $\iota$ -CONV. My worry concerns his claim that any serious fact-theorist will accept that *FIC* is +PSST. If, as is claimed by the position under discussion, definite descriptions are construed as singular terms, and thus fall within the ambit of PSST, it seems plain that non-extensional contexts will come out –PSST; and this for the simple reason that such contexts are – $\iota$ -SUBS. This, in fact, is precisely D. H. Mellor’s view when it comes to ©. Following Mellor,<sup>5</sup> let us suppose that several climbers fall but that

<sup>5</sup> *The Facts of Causation* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 117.

## New Books

(17) Don falls first because Don's rope is the weakest rope.

If we use  $\iota$ -SUBS to replace 'Don's rope' with 'the weakest rope', we get a clear falsehood, *viz.*,

(18) Don falls first because the weakest rope is the weakest rope.

Now, given the presumption that definite descriptions are singular terms, this means that '... because ...' is  $\neg$ PSST. But since a fact-theorist who takes definite descriptions to be singular terms can so readily treat '... because ...' as  $\neg$ PSST, is it so obvious that she will not want to adapt the counter-examples to attempt to demonstrate the same for *FIC*? Why should not Mellor, for example, deny that the fact that Don's rope is the weakest rope is the same fact as the fact that the weakest rope is the weakest rope? After all, if definite descriptions are singular terms, the former fact is contingent, whilst the latter is necessary. Furthermore, it is unclear, to me at least, why someone who took this line would then be unable to have his facts do any metaphysical work. Mellor, remember, takes facts to be causes. Given that a fact-theorist who holds definite descriptions to be singular terms may, in this way, relatively easily deny that *FIC* is  $\iota$ -SUBS, and thereby deny that it is  $\neg$ PSST, I have difficulty seeing why we should accept Neale's claim that his Gödelian slingshot provides indirect support for Russell's theory of descriptions (p. 13). We might well be pushed towards Russell's theory for all sorts of reasons, but Neale's slingshot provides no *new* such reason.

It is of the nature of the beast that a book review will spend a good deal of time outlining the points with which the reviewer takes issue. Putting such concerns to one side for a moment, what has to be stressed is that Neale's book is meticulous in its scholarship, compellingly written and rigorously argued. In the course of its careful thread of argument, it has extremely helpful and enlightening things to say about, for example, the truth-theoretic approach to meaning, the dualism of scheme and content, and the semantics of definite descriptions. More than this, it demands to be read by anyone interested in slingshot arguments. Nonetheless, and as I have said already, I was a little disappointed to see Neale fail to commit himself on many of the distinctively philosophical questions about the nature of facts. For if a theory of facts cannot be adequately motivated to begin with, whether or not it evades Neale's slingshot will begin to seem curiously beside the point. Perhaps one can be too much in love with philosophical logic.

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