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**Writing Conversationalists into History:
The Case of Burton Dreben**

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Burton Dreben taught a generation of scholars the value of closely attending to the recent philosophical past. But the few papers he authored do little to capture his philosophical voice. In this article, I turn instead to an unpublished transcript of Dreben in conversation with his contemporaries. In addition to yielding insights into a transitional period in W.V. Quine's and Donald Davidson's thought, I argue that this document showcases Dreben in his element, revealing the way that he shaped the views of key analytic philosophers. More broadly, I argue that by writing conversationalists like Dreben into our histories we can capture the collaborative nature of philosophy.

Writing Conversationalists into History: The Case of Burton Dreben

James Pearson

1. Historiographical Problems

Although historians of analytic philosophy have not always addressed or even paid attention to historiographical questions, there are a number of important decisions to be made about how to write analytic philosophy's history. Should we, for instance, follow Scott Soames and eschew "history-for-history's-sake" (2006, 662), avoid archival research, and work solely to distinguish successes from failures, fertile inquiries from dead ends? Or should we, with Michael Kremer, aim for a history that is also "a way of doing philosophy" (2013, 295), and which both appeals and is beholden to a broad range of unpublished and published material in its effort to understand the past? If we choose to craft a canon, how much should we attend to the philosophers we marginalize? And is the history of analytic philosophy, as Timothy Williamson predicts, perversely destined to be "written predominantly by the losers" (2014, 33)—undertaken, that is, by historically- and antimetaphysically-minded thinkers out of step with the ahistorical and pro-metaphysical sympathies of contemporary analytic philosophers? In this paper, I want to investigate the distinctive historiographical problems posed in accounting for a marginal figure who was also historically- and antimetaphysically-minded: Burton Dreben.

Dreben is one of a select group of twentieth-century analytic philosophers who were tenured at prestigious programs in North America, active in conferences and colloquia, widely well-regarded, and yet who published very little. Since the philosophers I am thinking of are often remembered by colleagues and students as dynamic and inspiring interlocutors, I shall call them "conversationalists."[1] Another such conversationalist is Rogers Albritton, who was tenured at Harvard in 1960, and who served as departmental chair there and later at UCLA. In the 1970s, Hilary Putnam recalls, P. F. Strawson counted Albritton among the ten best contemporary philosophers (quoted in Woo 2002). Putnam himself describes Albritton as a Socratic figure who could illuminate "a whole problem area" and make you "distrust anybody who thinks he has the key to all the problems" (quoted in Woo 2002). Yet Albritton—whose name some joked was a contraction of "all but written"—has left us only a handful of publications. Another example is Thompson Clarke, who joined Berkeley's faculty in 1958. Clarke wrote some noteworthy papers on skepticism and direct realism, but arguably more significant were his "careful focus and intensity" that, as Barry Stroud recalls, "were a powerful influence on the philosophical attitudes and practice of many students" (2012). Or we might think of Sidney Morgenbesser, active in Columbia University from 1956, whose clever interjections demonstrated the possibility—and value—of wit in a field of inquiry sometimes derided as dry. To take perhaps his most famous quip: when J. L. Austin lectured that natural languages allow double negatives to connote positives but not double positives to connote negatives, Morgenbesser retorted "yeah, yeah." Joe Camp at Pittsburgh, Dick Cartwright at MIT, Paul Benacerraf at Princeton, David Kaplan at UCLA, George Myro at Berkeley—each of these, in differing ways, had a significant impact despite rarely publishing.[2]

The conversationalists raise several historiographical problems. Their influence on the discipline—both its content and

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[1] My thanks to Thomas Ricketts and Warren Goldfarb for this name.

[2] Although I focus here on North American institutions, the tutorial system at Oxford and Cambridge allowed a number of conversationalists to thrive in the United Kingdom, such as John Cook Wilson, Austin, and Paul Grice. The posthumous publications of Austin's and Grice's work mean that they at least are not in danger of being lost to history, but the impact of their conversations with students and colleagues is less visible.

in how it is practiced—is not doubted by those who knew them. But anecdotes and fondly shared memories only circulate for so long, and are unlikely to survive for future generations interested in the workings of the field. If our disciplinary histories focus solely upon publications, these figures will likely be lost, which, *prima facie*, would be a pity. So our first historiographical problem is determining how to write—and write philosophically—about the work of those who themselves refrained from writing.

Perhaps the answer to this question is simply that we shouldn't. If peer-review functions as a gateway determining what is worthy of making it to the philosophical record, one might judge that although the conversationalists were important during their lifetimes, there is no philosophical harm done in allowing them to be forgotten. But I think that this would be a mistake. For one thing, articulating how the conversationalists shaped their philosophical communities may help us to explain the popularity of certain views and approaches in particular regions or institutions. For another, the very existence of the conversationalists has sociological lessons to teach us about twentieth century academic philosophy. To my knowledge, for example, this category excluded women and people of color, who had to prove their worth through publications to remain active in the field. And in the publish-or-perish mentality of our own increasingly competitive academic job market—much less the requirement for "measurable impact" demanded by such initiatives in governmental oversight as the United Kingdom's Research Excellence Framework—it is unlikely that the twenty-first century will germinate a corresponding crop of conversationalists. What, we might ask, will philosophy lose without such helpmeets, who sustained both their contemporaries and the graduate students who worked in their institutions? And might finding a way to celebrate and assess their work be a powerful weapon to use against bureaucratic trends deleterious to our profession and academia more generally?

Among the conversationalists, Dreben stands out as the most important figure for the history of analytic philosophy. Indeed,

I do not think it hyperbole to name Dreben a founder of the subdiscipline. Although Jean van Heijenoort was the official editor of *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931* (1967b), the project to publish a source book on logic in Harvard's History of Science series began eight years earlier with Dreben and Quine. It was Dreben who enlisted van Heijenoort to edit the *Source Book,* and he continued to work closely with him not just on the selection and translation of the material, but also on its influential editorial notes which shaped how many readers understood the significance of its contents (Ferreirós 2004, 120). The *Source Book* facilitated English language investigations into the logical side of early analytic philosophy, and also raised the standards for historical scholarship, now newly subject to assessment by easily accessible textual evidence. Dreben's lectures also inspired a cohort of young philosophers in the Boston area to plumb the depths of philosophy's recent past, taking what Michael Beaney calls analytic philosophy's historical turn (2013, 52–56). In the monographs and papers from this group that began to appear in the late 1980s and 1990s, Dreben's name frequently occurs in the acknowledgements. Jamie Tappenden (1997) credits Dreben's seminars with popularizing the reading of Frege as being opposed to metatheory, developed by Warren Goldfarb, Thomas Ricketts, and Joan Weiner.[3] In 2001, Juliet Floyd and Sanford Shieh's landmark collection *Future Pasts: The Analytic Tradition in Twentieth-Century Philosophy* appeared, which featured essays from students and colleagues written in Dreben's honor. Five of those contributors have been keynotes at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy, many more are regular attendees, and

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[3]A key text for this reading of Frege is van Heijenoort's "Logic as Calculus and Logic as Language," which was published the same year as the *Source Book.* An anonymous referee plausibly suggests that Dreben had a role in shaping van Heijenoort's ideas about Frege as they worked on the *Source Book* together, although I have not found evidence proving this. In later work, Dreben and van Heijenoort articulated this reading together (1986, 44).

I expect many other attendees also knew Dreben or have been taught by those he taught.

Barring one year at Oxford and another in Chicago, Dreben spent the entirety of his academic career in the Boston metropolitan area. Born in the city in 1927, he was made a professor at Harvard—his own alma mater—in 1956. He taught there until 1990, and then joined the faculty at Boston University from 1991 until his death in 1999. Dreben was a gifted administrator, serving as editor of the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* from 1967-1976, Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences from 1973-1976, and Chair of Harvard's prestigious Society of Fellows from 1976-1989. His primary interests, beyond mathematical logic, were the philosophies of Quine and Wittgenstein. Yet Dreben published little and was the sole author of still less. As Daniel Isaacson observes:

> The difficulty [Dreben] had in writing down his own philosophy, partly the outcome of principled doubts about the nature of the subject, perhaps also because he did not find writing itself easy (he was not a voluminous correspondent), meant that responding to an interlocutor helped him to express himself. Students would become his collaborators in the quest for understanding. The result was brilliant and inspiring teaching, which had a great impact on many students (Isaacson 1999).

Indeed, in this respect the form of the best of Dreben's sole-authored papers is striking. Rather than argumentative essays, Dreben typically set thinkers in conversation with each other (or even, in the case of "Quine on Quine," themselves). In "Quine and Wittgenstein: The Odd Couple," the passages quoted from primary texts far outstrip Dreben's own commentary. And in "Putnam, Quine—and the Facts," Dreben assails the reader with quotations drawn from Quine's oeuvre to rebut Putnam's interpretation, almost to the point of excess.

The intimate relationship between Dreben's philosophy and his pedagogy constitutes a second historiographical problem, for we have little access to Dreben in the classroom. To what extent can we extract philosophy from pedagogical style? In "On Rawls and Political Liberalism," the text of a lecture that became his posthumous contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, and upon which he was working in his final days, one can read Dreben's crisp rejoinders to a series of questions to glimpse how he used others to sharpen his own commitments (and also see how important he thought it to return to the text):

> **6th Questioner:** Let us suppose that you are right that there is no such society that you have just described.
> **Dreben:** Even if there is, it is not ours.
> **6th Questioner:** For the sake of argument, I shall agree. But just because every society has to have elements of fairness in it does not mean on its political level—which you're trying to bracket off from the rest of the culture—that fairness has to be the sole consideration. It seems to me that in the preamble to the Constitution the Founders set out a whole slew of objectives such as the creation of a more perfect union, the protection of the general welfare, etc., and then the job of the Constitution is to fulfill these objectives.
> **Dreben:** Yes, but all of those are political.
> **6th Questioner:** Well, you can argue that they are.
> **Dreben:** In fact Rawls does so explicitly in this paper, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited.' Look at page 584 (Dreben 2002, 336).

Instead of lecturing from notes that might merit archival study, John Rawls remembers Dreben as

> [bringing] a suitcase full—it seems—of xeroxes of numerous texts from Frege to Quine, with Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and Tarski, and many others in between. These xeroxes also include copies of significant reviews, letters from autobiographies, and other records. He could answer invitations to lecture with: "Have xeroxes, will talk." And talk he does, often with a characteristic combination of fun and bravado (Rawls 2001, 418–19).

Rawls goes on to describe Dreben as giving performances rather than lectures, and as being "extremely emphatic, sometimes even shouting as he refers to those he is attacking for their woefully misinformed and mistaken readings." The result was entertaining, if controversial. In a post on his blog in 2005, Brian Leiter

observes that "Dreben's pedagogical impact was so great that philosophers began to speak of some young philosophers being 'Drebenized', i.e., of being converted to Dreben's rather distinctive view of philosophy, and of philosophy's development in the 20th century" (Leiter 2005). But was the conversion achieved rationally (through convincing argument) or rhetorically (through masterful oratory)? In the ensuing comment thread, Jason Stanley alleges that Dreben made a "career by creating a cult of personality based on a myth of inexplicable depth." Like Wittgenstein, Dreben objected that certain kinds of philosophy lapsed into nonsense, yet unlike Wittgenstein, Stanley argues, Dreben failed to back up those judgments with publications. "In effect," Stanley writes, "Wittgenstein proved by his work that his was not a *myth* of depth." Not so Dreben, whose success, in Stanley's view, threatens our vision of the academy as a meritocracy, for "in the end we should all be judged on what we actually produce."[4] Defenders of Dreben were quick to rebuff Stanley's attack, noting his considerable influence not just on students who might perhaps be thought impressionable, but on his contemporaries Rawls, Putnam, and especially Quine.

Indeed, if we find a way to write the conversationalists into our histories of analytic philosophy, we might talk about Quine's naturalism as the Quine-Dreben view from Harvard, rather than crediting Quine alone. Dreben forcefully presented Quine's approach to others in ways that they could appreciate. In the brief time he spent away from Boston in the 1950s, he wrote to Quine from Oxford that Isaiah Berlin had described him as "acting as Quine's Baptist," and that "at the risk of sounding too important, [he thought he'd] forced some of [the faculty] to take cognizance of points which they either had casually dismissed or had not known" (Dreben to Quine, Nov 7 1950. W. V. Quine Papers, Item 315).[5] Similarly, from Chicago, he wrote that he was teaching

"a great deal of Quine" and that "among the students and faculty there is a great deal of uninformed interest in logic and the right kinds of philosophy; so I can play my favorite role of a missionary among heathen" (Dreben to Quine, December 24 1955. WVQP, item 315). Nor was he a neutral conduit for Quine's ideas, but rather a distinctly Wittgensteinian one that affected how a generation of students understood the commitments of naturalism. In Dreben's hands, Quine's investigation of speech as a physical phenomenon was an elaboration of Wittgenstein's slogan that meaning is use, and what needed emphasizing in Quine's approach to philosophy was its quietist power to reveal that nothing more—no distinctively philosophical theory—was needed. Quine's gratitude to Dreben for refining his presentation of naturalism is evidenced by his frequent acknowledgements, both publicly and in private communications. In a 1969 letter to Donald Davidson, for example, Quine writes:

> For years now [Dreben] has read most of my writings and discussed them with me before I've sent them off; and he has regularly caused improvements. He is a great clarifier of my philosophy to our students as well as to me. He is penetrating, articulate, and stimulating, and wholly free of philosophical nonsense and modality and such (Quine to Davidson, February 13 1969. WVQP, item 287).[6]

In the Quine archives, one can find a note that Quine gave Dreben in 1989 on which he wrote out a passage from *Culture and Value*: "It is typical of the Jewish mind to understand the work of another better than the other himself understands it" (WVQP, Item 315). ("Thank you so very much for the Wittgenstein quote," Dreben replied, "I truly appreciate it.")

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[4]Stanley recently reports being "embarrassed" by his naivety in using the word "meritocracy" to describe the academy (Schliesser 2016).

[5]The W. V. Quine Papers are abbreviated hereafter as WVQP. All transcriptions are mine. Dreben continues, "I've recommended your articles and especially your new text to so many people that I've been accused of receiving a commission from your publications." In his appreciative reply, Quine writes "Word seeped through [Morton] White from Berlin that you were the center of considerable philosophical turmoil, as indeed I can imagine. I am sure that insofar as you are explaining my views you are putting them over more effectively than I would" (Quine to Dreben, Jan 4 1951, WVQP, item 315).

[6]My thanks to Sander Verhaegh for directing me to this letter.

Yet determining (and detailing) the *precise* nature of Dreben's influence on Quine's published work constitutes a third historiographical problem. As Keith DeRose writes in the comment thread of Leiter's post, "it may well be rational to judge someone who didn't publish much himself but played a very important role in some very important philosophy written by others" as having "a better (even if more difficult to assess) philosophical record than someone who wrote a good amount of good-but-not-very-important philosophy himself." But how can the historian identify the nature of Dreben's "very important role"? Did Dreben originate some of the philosophical ideas we associate with Quine, or perhaps cause Quine to shift his ideas in a Wittgensteinian direction? Or did he merely suggest fruitful ways of organizing and presenting the ideas that Quine already had?[7]

In my view, we cannot draw a sharp line between philosophical ideas and their presentation. Even if Dreben "merely" used his pedagogical expertise in teaching Quine's approach to help Quine articulate his position compellingly in print form, his contribution is worth acknowledging and celebrating. An example of Dreben doing just this has recently come to light with Gary Ebbs's transcription of the successive drafts that Quine wrote in reply to Ebbs's review of *Pursuit of Truth,* one before and one after consultation with Dreben. In the revision, as Ebbs notes, Quine newly opens by zeroing in upon Ebbs's (2016, 24) main objection (that Quine has adulterated his "naturalism with mentalism" by abandoning intersubjectively shared stimulations and invoking empathy to explain the procedure of translation), and makes explicit that his position relies upon his nonstandard conception of science:

> We have no word with the breadth of *Wissenschaft,* but that is what I have in mind. History is at home in my naturalism as physics and mathematics. So also, indeed, is translation (Quine 2016, 34).

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[7]I thank an anonymous referee for pressing this distinction.

As anyone who has taught his work knows, this exact point is one that trips up many newcomers to Quine's philosophical orientation, and serves to blunt the charge that naturalism evinces scientism. Dreben's hand can also be seen in the new citations that Quine provides of his earlier publications, and the detail with which he discusses them. In the initial draft Quine signals that he intends the appeal to empathy in *Pursuit of Truth* to be an innocent redescription of the behavioral observations made by *Word and Object*'s field linguist, but in the sequel he not only cites the relevant passages in both texts, but adds that it ought to have been clear from *Word and Object* that he never believed the linguist had access to the concept of stimulus meaning or nerve endings since "the notion of stimulus meaning does not even emerge until a later page (p. 32)" (Quine 2016, 33). Quine also notes, citing *Roots of Reference* and thanking Dreben, that each individual's standards of perceptual similarity (the judgment of which is something that the empathetic translator relies upon) are in principle testable, further disarming the suspicion that invoking empathy is to abandon science (2016, 35).

What of Quine's relationship to Wittgenstein? Although Quine never engaged with Wittgenstein's work in any detail, his views evolved to become compatible with Wittgenstein's in a way that may suggest Dreben at work in the background. Quine makes scant reference to Wittgenstein in the 1960s, doing little more in *Word and Object* than adopting a turn of phrase here and noting a point of contact there. But in the new foreword Quine wrote in 1980 for the second edition of *From a Logical Point of View,* for instance, he does not merely approve of the Wittgensteinian slogan "meaning is use," but employs this rhetoric to rebut the objection that words are not just strings of phonemes but strings with meanings: "[Proponents of this objection] fail to see that a bare and identical string of phonemes can *have* a meaning, or several...through its use by sundry people or peoples...without

somehow containing them" (1980, viii).[8] And while some commentators, like P. M. S. Hacker, have sought to drive a wedge between them on the grounds that Quine's behaviorist approach to language is incapable of capturing the role played by rules in Wittgenstein's, such readings mistakenly present Quine's naturalism as oppositional to normativity.[9] In fact, Quine views the scientific standards by which we assess our theories to be our (revisable) norms, with the "most notable norm" being the "watchword of empiricism: *nihil in mente quod non prius in sensu* [nothing in the intellect unless first in the senses]" (1992, 19). The particular norms (or "grammatical rules") to which Wittgenstein appeals are also available to Quine, though he would not describe them in the same way. For despite famously opposing the analytic/synthetic distinction, Quine came to recover a sense in which a sentence could be held analytic for a speaker, "if he learned the truth of the sentence by learning the use of one or more of its words" (2008b, 395). As Gary Kemp argues, this account easily extends to criteria and rules:

> Quine can go along with the characterisation of such lessons as lessons of 'grammar,' as unsubstantive points of the use of language—even if, 'legalistically' as Quine would put it later (Quine 2008b, 393), their ultimate justification is the same sort of thing as for any sentence, holistically via its role in the web. And thus, crucially, Quine can allow that certain statements function to 'set up the game,' as ones that normally have to be assumed between people in order to begin talking, as ones that are not normally called into question (Kemp 2014, 13).

Kemp reads both Wittgenstein and Quine as coming to espouse "linguistic naturalism," united in their belief that "an appeal to

the community is important for describing how normativity is actually generated and why it is social, but [recognizing that that appeal] does not change the ultimate contingency of the facts underlying language" (2014, 12).

As suggestive of Dreben's influence upon Quine as these shifts may be, they do not allow the historian to shed much light upon Dreben himself. So, what sources might we use to articulate Dreben's contributions, and to what extent can we do so in a way that preserves his characteristic style? The focus of my article will be an unpublished transcript of a conference that he attended. It is here, in philosophical conversation with his peers, that I think the historian has the best chance of capturing something of what made Dreben distinctively Dreben.

2. Dreben in Conversation

In 1986, Dagfinn Føllesdal wrote to Quine suggesting a meeting at Stanford "where a very small group of people, three or four, who know your philosophy very well get together to discuss your philosophy with you" (Føllesdal to Quine, Feb 18 1986. WVQP, Item 363). Quine agreed, while ruefully replying "I find it hard to picture us raising, discussing, and settling one problem after another for four days. It would be a historic occasion if it worked out that way" (Quine to Føllesdal, June 28 1986. WVQP, Item 363). The eventual attendees of the closed conference were Føllesdal, Quine, Donald Davidson, and Dreben. While few problems were definitively settled, the participants judged the meetings to be a success. Quine, Davidson, and Føllesdal would each report what they took the upshot of the Stanford discussions to be in later publications. According to Quine, the main topic discussed was his account of radical translation—the situation faced by a linguist trying to break into a wholly unknown language—and the role he had assigned to the sharing of perceptions between the translator and subject. "I came away cleansed of any lingering thoughts of shared stimulus meanings," he writes, "but

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[8]Dreben approvingly quotes this passage—emphasizing the word "use"—in his paper on Wittgenstein and Quine (1996, 50). Compare Quine (1981, 44).

[9]"While Quine presents the child as being conditioned in the use of language... Wittgenstein conceives of language learning as not just a matter of conditioned response... [What is] to be learnt are the [rule-governed] techniques of a normative practice" (Hacker 1996, 15).

unrelieved of my own discomfort over our shared reference *in distans*" (1998a, 737). Davidson also identifies the merits of his own distal account of what perceivers share (namely, their experience of events and objects in the world) as opposed to Quine's proximal account (namely, their propensities to be sensorially stimulated by that world) as being key to the meetings, where he and Quine had "Dagfinn Føllesdal and Burt Dreben to help [them] out" (1999a, 59) in a back and forth that spanned the entire decade. Føllesdal remembers Davidson being "astonished and disappointed that Quine did not accept" the theory of triangulation at the heart of his distal account, writing that "Quine insisted from beginning to end that although the idea of triangulation contains a core of truth, it also pushes crucial philosophical problems under the carpet" (2014, 269). But Dreben's role in the Stanford conversations is passed over. Nor, unsurprisingly, did he publish his own account.

Føllesdal arranged for the audio recordings that had been taken at the conference to be transcribed (by then undergraduate, now tenured philosopher, Shaun Nichols). Quine added marginal comments and line-edits to a hard copy that Føllesdal mailed to him, and part of this document—approximately 250 pages—survives in the Quine Archive.[10] To my knowledge, it is the sole remaining copy of the transcript, and our only record of how events played out. Studying it reveals that the participants discussed much more than their published reports suggest. A thorny knot of interrelated problems connected to Quine's proximal and Davidson's distal views were hashed out, including the intelligibility of ontological relativity, Quine's mutual containment thesis (of ontology in epistemology and epistemology in

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[10]WVQP, Item 2749. The document is split into separately paginated sections, each of which is numbered—presumably by Quine—with a penciled Roman numeral. I shall cite my transcriptions with both identifiers (so that, for instance, "III, 4" indicates the fourth page of the third section). I have corrected obvious spelling and grammar errors, and use square brackets for more significant clarifications of the transcript.

ontology), the threat of skepticism, and empirically equivalent global theories of reality. In addition to yielding insights into a transitional period in both Quine's and Davidson's thought, the document reveals Dreben peppering all three of his interlocutors with quick, sharp, and thoughtful critiques. I propose using it to first articulate some of Dreben's philosophical contributions, and second to examine his conversational pedagogy.

3. What Dreben Said

First, Dreben adds a quietist Wittgensteinian voice to the positions under discussion. While Davidson and Quine grapple with the intelligibility of ontological relativity at home, for instance, Dreben is resolute that the significance of this thesis be understood as ultimately antimetaphysical. According to Quine, reference is inscrutable in the sense that we can consistently translate each person's utterances as referring to a variety of things. A person's usage of the word "rabbit," for instance, can be permuted under a "proxy function" to pick out the "place-time" in which the rabbit exists. There is thus no way of telling to which object—rabbits or their place-time proxies—a person is referring. Indeed, there is no underlying fact of the matter that settles this question. Rather, the ontology we attribute to others is relative to the manual of translation we choose for them. But now, to what does our *own* word "rabbit" refer? Is there no fact of the matter here either? When we consider the reference of our own speech and our own ontology, Quine had written in "Ontological Relativity," in practice we resolve these quandaries by "acquiescing in our mother tongue" (1969, 49). Davidson balks at Quine's use of "acquiescing." For while he accepts the inscrutability of reference as applied to others, he thinks it unintelligible in application to oneself:

It's not as though you don't raise the question, which is the way "Ontological Relativity" puts it. It isn't that we say, "well let's stop

here with our language." There isn't anything else you can do, and so the question doesn't arise (I, 30).

In Davidson's view, Quine has satisfactorily established that we can each translate others' utterances in various incompatible ways using our own language. But he can find no parallel sense in which we can correctly be described as reinterpreting our own language *in* our own language (I, 37).[11] In later publications Quine backed away from "acquiescence" in formulating the thesis of ontological relativity and instead emphasized that the disquotational paradigms (such as " 'rabbits' refers to rabbits") trivially resolve questions about reference phrased in the home language (1992, 52).[12] Yet Dreben insists that "indeterminacy of translation is really only interesting applied to yourself" (I, 11). The reason is that it undermines a philosophical impulse:

> The point is that it's an attempt to make a reductio — as if we had some thick metaphysical sense of reference that somehow latches onto the world. . . The problem is somebody might think denotes is some physical property or something like that that latches onto the world, but you can't (I, 28).

Alarmed that Davidson's cajoling might lead Quine to allow that word-world relations can be made out in the home language because of the disquotational paradigms, thereby creating an entering wedge for the metaphysician to create a capital-T Theory of capital-R Reality, Dreben insists that the series of technical issues Davidson raises do not affect the significance of the thesis "standing outside of [our language], theoretically" (I, 18). All they amount to is that

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[11]We can imagine speaking a different language (in which we, say, talk only about place-times), and we can also observe that various other sentences (such as ones that refer to place-times) would be true in the same circumstances as the ones we use. But neither of these thought experiments, Davidson insists, amount to reinterpretations of our own language in our own language.

[12]Quine also follows Davidson in maintaining that reference is relative only to language, rather than doubly relative to language and manual of translation.

I cannot express the relativity of my own ontology. In my language "rabbit" denotes rabbit. But that isn't denying that there is a relativity of my ontology to my own language that is exactly analogous to the relativity of ontology that I can find in your language. . . It's not that there's some deep fact that can't be expressed by me about myself. But the fact that I cannot express the relativity of my ontology in my language doesn't mean that there isn't a relativity of my ontology that is exactly analogous to the relativity I can express about you" (I, 33).

For Dreben, the power of ontological relativity is revealing that the search for an ultimate theory of ontology is fruitless, a metaphysical dream that Quine has shown us how to abandon.[13]

Another example of Dreben's Wittgensteinianism is his attitude towards what the conference participants refer to as "science fiction" cases. When Davidson tries to argue that Quine's naturalized epistemology lacks an adequate answer to skepticism, Dreben interjects that regarding truly radical cases, such as whether the possibility of a disembodied brain in a vat being fed stimulations entails that our theory could match all possible stimulations and yet be false, we should not feel obliged to have an answer:

> Once you start talking about all possible observation and you say that the theory will fit all possible observation, then this question becomes peculiar. We're starting out trying to talk about idealized truth but still serious science. In serious science you're never going to have all possible observations. . . At that point we don't know what to say. We have semantic legislation. We can decide now at the extreme how we want to use these notions. . . If you're going to add to that that throughout all time your senses will always deceive you and you will never know they deceive you, then I'm prepared to say, and I hope Van would agree, that we've reached the point where these notions have exploded. That's the problem. And in that sense Carnap was right. It's a meaningless question. And this

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[13]Dreben seems to happily embrace what Matti Eklund calls the "despair" view about ontology as a result of reflecting on ontological relativity (2007, 122).

doesn't have to do with anything. And you can simply go either way. All of Quine's talk about theory and evidence and ontology doesn't go by the board whichever answer you give at that point (III, 8-9).

Davidson is unhappy with this response, but Quine, at this juncture, is persuaded:

> What I like particularly is Burt's last suggestion that. . . this is the sort of oscillation that comes when a real science fiction question is raised in philosophy, 'what would you say if?' And now, Burt's suggestion is that the ordinary terms, the language that was serving us, ceases to serve us because we're getting that far out (III, 10).[14]

For Dreben, like Wittgenstein, philosophers must learn to avoid being drawn to give answers to questions that are phrased when language "goes on holiday" (Wittgenstein 1953/2001, section 38). As Hilary Putnam puts it, "Dreben has the remarkable ability to convey this Wittgensteinian insight [namely, that working through a problem can reveal it to be empty] to students (including his colleagues)" (Putnam 1997, 194).

 Second, Dreben makes two significant points about empirically equivalent global theories that, to my knowledge, are not explored in Quine's or Davidson's later publications. Quine held that a theory's empirical content is the set of observation categoricals that it implies, and that theories are empirically equivalent if they imply the same set of observation categoricals.[15] Now, suppose that we were to develop two empirically equivalent theories that accord globally with all of our observations, and yet

which are jointly incompatible—one positing an entity whose existence the other denies. What should our attitude towards such theories be? During the years before the conference, Quine vacillated between ecumenism (holding both theories true, having used subscripts to avoid logical contradiction) and sectarianism (holding the theory one is using true and the other false or meaningless,[16] though being free to switch to the other), but wrote in his reply to Roger Gibson's contribution to the Schilpp volume (which he was working on in the year prior to the Stanford meetings) that sectarianism "is my newly recovered stance" (1998b, 157). The first point Dreben makes is to forge a link between empirically equivalent global theories and skepticism:

> I believe we reached a statement of what skepticism would come to: two empirically equivalent theories which fit all possible observations; the two theories are couched in the same language, and one theory is the one that we really are holding, the other one has several sentences negated opposite of the theory that we hold. That at least states what [Barry] Stroud or any skeptic would care to add. And then the question now is, does that make sense? (III, 12).

Later, Dreben uses empirically equivalent theories to formulate Davidson's objection that Quine cannot rule out solipsism:

> I, Dreben, am indeed the only scientist, and all the rest of you are puppets or something if that's our theory. . . That could be empirically equivalent to the regular theory. . . It's a really interesting view. You've [Quine] been groping in a serious way to give an analysis of observation in terms of observation sentences, which is on the

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[14]Quine incorporates Dreben's proposal for deflating the apparent power of a slightly different outlandish counterfactual in *Pursuit of Truth*: "The fantasy of irresolubly rival systems of the world is a thought experiment out beyond where linguistic usage has been crystalized by use. No wonder the cosmic question whether to call two such world systems true should simmer down, bathetically, to a question of words" (1992, 100–101). For more on the nuanced response to skepticism Quine ultimately adopts, see Pearson (2011, 2–3).

[15]An observation categorical asserts a general connection between two observation sentences—Quine gives the schema "Whenever this, that"—that may be tested and refuted by observations in the field (1992, 10–13).

[16]At the conference Quine sometimes formulates the sectarian attitude as holding the alternative theory false (IV, 35), and sometimes as holding the alternative theory meaningless (III, 14). He says that he devised the latter formulation to take "some of the curse off" (VI, 8) the former, since it offends empiricism to hold an empirically adequate theory false. In a subsequent publication he argues that the "meaningless" formulation of sectarianism is preferable on the grounds that our theory's truth predicate is only applicable to statements phrased in (or translatable into) our language (1990, 14). My thanks to an anonymous referee for alerting me to this distinction.

surface a public notion. And then it might be, by the deepest sort of scientific inquiry it turns out, that it's a private notion (IV, 34).

Dreben's connection exposes a further reason for Quine's sectarian preference: it allows us to hold skeptical scenarios false, whereas ecumenism would require us to hold them true. As Quine puts it:

We can't refute [solipsism], except that it's not our theory, and we can't get outside of our theory, so we do say that it's false. But we might concede further on investigation that it is as well warranted as ours. And therefore on the vine for which you've [Davidson] expressed preference over this question of empirically equivalent theories, our position should be, yes well that's true too. That's what I'm not persuaded of now (IV, 35).

Why does Davidson prefer ecumenism? It is not, of course, that he is tempted to endorse solipsism, a view that he describes as "an unthinkable possibility. If you find there's nobody else in the world, then you find that after all you don't mean anything. You don't think anything" (VI, 36). Rather, he favors ecumenism because he thinks that holding a set of sentences to *be* a theory presupposes having *interpreted* them as a theory (V, 7), and that in the course of interpretation—ascribing content to the beliefs held by someone we come to understand—we inevitably make others' beliefs largely true (VI, 19). He concludes that there is no reason to rule out the novel "conceptual sources" (new ways of classifying entities) made available by the other theory: "What I object to is while you're in one theory saying that the other's false. . . not just saying it's true and maybe saying it's useless so let it go, or that it isn't doing any harm" (VI, 7–8). His own answer to skepticism also relies on this theory of interpretation. "An easy way of thinking of my answer to Stroud," Davidson says, is that the solipsist "isn't speaking the language that Stroud thinks he is" (V, 11). Later he clarifies that while he has no answer to the form of skepticism that imagines a person being kidnapped and put into a vat, a brain that was envatted from birth can (and must) be thought of as talking about the real world we share:

If the scientists are observing the outside world and feed into the computer what's going on in the outside world, then he's [the envatted brain] in causal contact with the outside world. He's just got a certain more complicated perceptual apparatus than the rest of us. And then he's talking about the outside world (VI, 53).[17]

But putting aside the connection Dreben sees between empirically equivalent theories and skepticism, his second contribution is to work through the details of what empirically equivalent theories would look like in practice, rather than rushing to accept their intelligibility and being forced to make a decision between sectarianism and ecumenism at all. Prior to the conference, Quine had articulated both sectarianism and ecumenism in terms of theories: either one accepts one's own theory as true and rejects the alternative, or one crafts a tandem theory in which both are true. He is persuaded that incompatible theories might offer differing insights on a particular topic—a fact that pulls him in an ecumenical direction—but repeatedly worries about what he calls "nirvana" cases, in which a theory equivalent to our own has, from his perspective, an unnecessary "dangling" term: "what I'd like to see is a sharp and invidious distinction that would shut 'nirvana' out, and let some of these other things in" (V, 25). But Dreben cautions Quine from thinking that nirvana cases matter, or that there need be a single attitude appropriate for every case:

Let me ask, why do you want it Van? Why are you looking for an invidious distinction? Where did it come out of, this idea of two empirically equivalent indistinguishable theories? This is a full exaggeration from where in serious science we do sometimes have equivalent theories (V, 25–26).

Emphasizing scientific history rather than science fiction, Dreben leads the others through a discussion of what might constitute

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[17]Although I cannot pursue this here, the Stanford transcript suggests that Davidson directs his transcendental argument at a very specific skeptical target. I intend to elaborate on this strategy, and its plausibility, in future work.

a real case of incompatible empirically equivalent theories—through quantum mechanics, physicalism and mentalism—ultimately landing on set theory: "Yes use Frankel's set theory and use Quine's set theory, and you can't translate them into each other, and you can do exactly the same physics" (V, 40). Davidson holds firm in ecumenism: "The combined physical theory plus the mathematics that we get from set theory in different ways, that these are empirically equivalent seems right. And so if one's true the other is" (VI, 6). The other three worry, however, that this attitude is unduly extravagant. As Føllesdal puts it, "You don't want to believe both because that seems to be just too much. It's just needlessly much" (VI, 7). Davidson retorts "Abstract objects and so forth don't use up any space. It's not as though the world was getting crowded because we've got so many abstract objects, as long as we understand them" (VI, 8). But Dreben worries that they have once again strayed away from why the case matters. "I do feel… there does seem something so unreal. We're trying in some sense to reconstruct… the process of serious science, only to end up saying that you're going to have both Zermelo/Frankel sets and Quine's classes of sets" (VI, 10).

To get them back on track, Dreben returns to the level of practice. If logicians were to develop interesting results within Zermelo/Frankel set theory and incompatible but also interesting results in Quine's set theory, "you're going to have a different meta-logic if you like. You're going to have reasons to explore the differences. Now we're very far from where we started, with doing the physics. But you have an interest in the, if you like, the superstructure, so that there's a reason for multiplying" (VI, 12). Davidson crows that Dreben is coming around to his point of view, but Quine insists that Dreben's exploration could be done "without considering each theory as a total system of the world. You could think of them in terms of oscillating" (VI, 12). And Quine's use of the phrase "total system" in response to Dreben leads Davidson to suggest a third view, which Quine in later publications refers to as "ecumenism a la Davidson":

I think I'm beginning to see this as a third alternative, namely dissociating truth from theory and associating it simply with the language. So we can regard all these things as true, and then one particular interest we may have is a system of the world…here we're getting the effect of the tandem theory without making the tandem theory because we're just tandemizing truth but not theory (VI, 13–14).

On the new version of ecumenism, we drop the idea that our theory captures all of the truths. As Føllesdal summarizes, on this view "the truths would simply be all the alternatives that might be useful, but our theory comprises only one" (VI, 14). Dreben is struck by the marked difference this reveals between Quine and Davidson:

Quine has been inclined to think of a system of the world as encompassing all one's truth… This way out or this approach seems very interesting not just for the immediate question, but because it shifts very much the whole picture of why you are concerned with the question. And it really does throw light and weight on what you've [Davidson] been saying directly and indirectly for the last two and a half days (VI, 17–18).

Dreben perceives that Davidson's frequently voiced dissatisfaction with the Quinean turn of phrase of truth being "inside" a theory is coming to fruition in this new version of ecumenism. If Quine accepts it, Dreben remarks, "It cuts back the force of saying you're dealing with a big theory. It emphasizes much more truth for each theory, and theory becomes much more just some form of organization for the moment" (VI, 18). And Quine is tempted:

It seems to me to reduce truth to the more humdrum, humble status that it ought to have from Tarski's point of view. When we think in terms of a system of the world, ostensibly the one true system of the world, and then raise the question of how about another one like it, then even though it's still Tarski's theory of truth, it's got some of the exaltation that the notion of truth has had down the ages. And now maybe I think this cuts it down to size (VI, 18).

By *Pursuit of Truth,* however, Quine is clear that although this third route is preferable to his earlier conception of ecumenism, he ultimately still prefers sectarianism:

> What is to be gained is not evident, apart from the satisfaction of conferring the cachet of truth evenhandedly. The sectarian is no less capable than the ecumenist of appreciating the equal evidential claims of the two rival theories of the world. He can still be evenhanded with the cachet of warrantedness, if not of truth. Moreover, he is as free as the ecumenist to oscillate between the two theories for the sake of added perspective from which to triangulate on problems. In his sectarian way he does deem the one theory true and the alien terms of the other theory meaningless, but only so long as he is entertaining the one theory rather than the other. He can readily shift the shoe to the other foot" (Quine 1992, 100).

Yet Dreben's reflections on the set-theoretic case suggest a different benefit of ecumenism that Quine passes over. If scientists really were to discover incompatible empirically equivalent theories that were both useful, they would not rest content with sectarian oscillation. They would want to raise questions and develop theories about the relationship between the two theories, such as what the differences between them really amount to, and determining which theory is most useful for which purposes, and why. The motivation for this work is obscured by sectarianism, on which they are pictured as thinking one theory false or meaningless. It is better captured by ecumenism, where the theories are simultaneously thought to contain truths.

   The last of Dreben's contributions that I wish to highlight is his deep understanding and frequent deployment of Quine's mutual containment thesis. I think that the containment metaphor itself is poorly chosen, for it makes the position seem paradoxical. But understanding the sense in which Quine is entitled to shift from epistemology to ontology and back again—what Juliet Floyd has aptly described as dancing with Quine—is at the heart of naturalism. At the conference, Dreben repeatedly emphasizes that

there is no "Archimedean point" in Quine's philosophy, no position from which you can survey everything at once. In mediis rebus—in the midst of things—one can turn for a time to one's scientific theory, which tells us about facts and reality, and for a time to methodology, or what Dreben often calls "theory of theory," which will tell us about evidence, or what it is to ask what reality is.[18] But neither has priority over the other, and some questions are only answerable from one or other perspective. Here is Dreben on the significance of this point for proxy functions:

> You see the trick is what is often confusing in what's been going on with Van is that proxy functions are part of epistemology. They talk about ontology, but when you're talking ontology you're in the language once and for all and you're talking about whatever your language permits. When you stand back and do the epistemology on yourself, then you recognize that there is no Archimedean point. There's no position from which you can say "there really are physical objects"...When I'm simply talking in my language, and I'm talking about what is from within, then I'm realist as possible (I, 11).

And here is Quine and Dreben on the significance of this point for skepticism, which also shows Dreben's influence upon Quine as he corrects him about his own views:

> Quine: All we're claiming in our science is that the world fits this structure as far as it goes. That's an attractive position.
> Dreben: We're not claiming that within our science. We're claiming that when we talk about the nature of science. Within our science

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[18]At one point, Dreben characterizes Davidson, too, as starting in the midst of things by focusing on the distal situation shared by triangulators. Quine somewhat pedantically replies, "I think that's great. The only slight emendation I would suggest is that I wouldn't say that Don really begins in medias res, I would say he plunges in medias res but he begins in mediis rebus." "Yes, you're quite right," Dreben concedes, "Your Latin's always been better than mine" (IV, 15). ("In medias res" translates as "*into* the middle of things," whereas "in mediis rebus" translates as "*in* the middle of things.) My thanks to Mark Thakkar for discussion on this point.

we're saying what is the case. And that's the point you're trying to make. That's why you say all these questions, even your answer, is an immanent answer. . . And I really think that's where you've made the real contribution. And it's very, very hard to keep it clear. It's not something to get caught on. It's really I think a most deep distinction that Van from the beginning has fluctuated between doing the ontology and doing the epistemology. I've always said there's a big difference between chapters one and two in *Word and Object* and all the rest. . . There is a distinction between talking about science in general, and talking about what is the case. And what is the case can only be done within our ongoing science. And talking about what is science you do of course within it, but you take a different stance (III, 3–4).

And, finally, here is an amusing interaction that shows the role Dreben played in articulating the Quinean response to skepticism. Davidson reads out a passage from Quine's published reply to Stroud that he finds puzzling, and Dreben notes:

> Dreben: This is exactly what you have on page twenty two of *Theories and Things* without mentioning Stroud.
> Davidson: Furthermore you're grateful to Burton Dreben.
> Dreben: Righto, that's why I'm going to defend it all (II, 54–55).

Dreben proceeds to remind Quine of the conversation they had which led him to this position.

> Now your whole point is, what evaporates is the transcendental question of the reality of the external world. . . I remember when we discussed this I said you had to answer Barry Stroud. You had to show, given your view, that there had to be some empirical sense given to skepticism. . . And the way you give sense to skepticism comes on pages twenty-two and twenty-three, but this is all within epistemology. That is, our scientific theory can indeed go wrong. . . What if happily and unbeknownst to us we have achieved a theory that is conformable to every possible observation past and future? In what sense could the world then be said to deviate from what the theory claims? Clearly in none. . . More concrete demands than that are empty, what with the freedom of proxy functions (III, 1–2).

4. How Dreben Said It

Having articulated some of Dreben's contributions, I would like now to examine *how* he made those contributions. What characteristic maneuvers or patterns emerge from Dreben's way of articulating his views, and what might they reveal about why so many philosophers were grateful to him?

First, of the four it is Dreben who most frequently ties the topics under discussion to the views of other philosophers. He chimes in with sometimes quite detailed reminders about which projects have succeeded and which have failed, why particular topics have a broader significance, and so on. Once he gets Davidson to articulate the role he wants observation sentences to play in his theory of interpretation, for instance, and Davidson clarifies his thesis that it is in the nature of beliefs to be veridical, Dreben says "You're getting closer to the original Carnap positivist protocol sentence with your observation sentences—not about sense data, but they're playing the same role" (IV, 18). And when Quine raises once again his desire for an invidious distinction to rule out nirvana cases, Dreben also links his attitude to Carnap, on whose views he acts as an authority:

> Dreben: What you [Quine] just said now is what Carnap spent his life insisting. . . He wanted to keep what was useful for science but he didn't want to keep nirvana. What you're worried about is what he was worrying about, and he wanted to get criteria for it.
> Quine: And here utility and prediction would be the answer for Carnap wouldn't it?
> Dreben: Not only that, but that's where he had the verifiability theory of meaning he wanted. He wanted a clear cut criterion to rule out nirvana cases, and put this way the motivation was very good. He didn't succeed for reasons that we've all agreed on (VI, 9).

Elsewhere Dreben acts as an authority on Russell (III, 19) and, to a lesser extent, Nelson Goodman (VI, 21–22). And in a particularly insightful passage, he historicizes Quine and Davidson:

Quine starts with the Russell problem. And Don goes above it. Quine naturalized the Russell position. Davidson starts after that. Now I'm not saying one's right... Davidson's approach is like Frege's taking meaning in common. He [Davidson] replaces the common mean. That's why he took in terms of the indeterminacy of translation and said, "does that reify means"? He replaces Frege by naturalizing Frege. Whereas Quine naturalizes Russell or Carnap. And that's really the analogy you want to see (VI, 38–39).

What is the sense in which Dreben sees Davidson naturalizing Frege? According to Frege, two people are said to communicate or understand one another if they both separately grasp the same objective thought. It is in virtue of the shared objective thought—what Dreben here calls the "common mean"—that they count as agreeing or disagreeing rather than talking past one another. What Davidson takes from Quine's radical translation is that Frege's reification of meanings as objective thoughts is unnecessarily extravagant to explain mutual understanding. His theory of triangulation is meant to secure the origin of objectivity (which, he argues at length, is also the origin of subjectivity) in more homely terms of our intersubjectivity. In contrast, Dreben sees Quine naturalizing "Russell or Carnap" in the sense that Quine replaces their program of rationally reconstructing our theory of reality with the program of developing a scientifically informed theory of evidence, capable of explaining how beings like us develop our theory of reality on the basis of our sensory stimulations.

Over the course of the conference, Dreben repeatedly tries to articulate Quine's and Davidson's different approaches in ways that they can both be brought to accept. Davidson assumed, for example, that Quine's definition of a statement's stimulus meaning—that is, the set of stimulations that provoke assent to and dissent from the statement in the person one is attempting to translate—relied upon being able to perceive the attitude of holding a statement true, the very same attitude that is fundamental to his own account of radical interpretation. But Dreben emphasizes that Quine employs a much thinner notion in order to constuct observation sentences:

What Van—with the notion of observation sentence—is trying to do is to give a precise technical notion, which will be a theoretical notion in his proposed theory of evidence and language learning. An observation sentence is supposed to be the technical correlate which he has to define quite explicitly. That's the task he's setting himself. So, he can begin to give a theoretical analysis of the notion of evidence and the relation of evidence to a scientist's theory. That I take to be his fundamental enterprise... And it all has to satisfy the constraints of being physicalistic... He uses the notion of stimulus meaning, which itself is a technical notion explicitly defined and hence quite a high level theoretical notion in fact, but it's all spelled out to get you to observation sentence... And there's not much difficulty defining stimulus meaning granted that we can give, in this strict sense of physical, some adequate physical analysis of the general notion of assent, and Van's notion of surface assent (which is a way of getting in which I brought along, in case we want to get into the details). Surface assent is the physicalist surrogate of full-fledged intentional assent. Just like stimulus meaning in no way gives you meaning in the intuitive sense, so Quine's use of assent to get stimulus meaning is also not full-fledged assent, the intuitive notion (IV, 12–13).

In other words, "surface assent" is fallibly ascribed to those one translates on the basis of one's observations of them—their patterns of uttering "evet" and "yok,"[19] their facial expressions and bodily positions, and so on—and does not constitute implicitly attributing certain cognitive abilities to them. Dreben proceeds to emphasize that although Davidson has correctly shown the conference attendees that a notion of perceptual similarity is being assumed in Quine's account (for observation sentences must be public, and yet there is no sense in which people share stimulations), and that his preferred "distal" starting point for interpretation bypasses this problem by building perceptual sim-

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[19]These are the words Quine imagines a translator supposing correspond to "yes" and "no" (1960, 29–30).

ilarity into the notion of a shared event, he has yet to make clear the fundamental terms of his project:

> Prima facie it seems quite plausible. But that's because that's really Moorean common sense to start with. You [Davidson] start saying that you're going to start talking about a series of books in front of me and you see those books in front of me and I say, "there are books in front of me." You begin to interpret me. That's fine. But it doesn't tell me very much. So at least you have to say quite a bit about the causal relation that's going on here. And it just can't be taken as primitive just like that. And then I ask, are you going to give me some physicalist account of this relation between the books in front of me and the books in front of you and my utterance and your utterance (IV, 42).

In the theory of triangulation that Davidson was in the process of developing, he repeatedly invokes "causal chains" that stream to both the interpreter and interpretee from the event they share. These chains are meant to fix the ontology of what both are talking about. But Dreben presses for further details, taking "cause" to be a broad and loose choice of fundamental concept—certainly more controversial than Quine's clearly explicated "observation sentence." He comes close to chiding Davidson for his comparative vagueness: "You [Davidson] are not interested in giving, as far as I can tell, clean explications of almost any of the notions that you used" (IV, 11). He also cautions Davidson from thinking that he will be entitled to employ Quinean terminology if he does not accept the Quinean starting point:

> What do you [Davidson] mean by observation sentence? If you don't have a notion of observation sentence, what do you mean by "two empirically equivalent theories"? (IV, 9–10).

> But you [Davidson] don't have proxy functions. You have perhaps some kind of analogue that I don't quite know how to define, because you do have to have constraints on them and I don't know what the constraints are. For instance, you don't have

a crude specified notion. Maybe you're hinting at something, just like this causal chain (IV, 36).[20]

Second, Dreben also relates the views being discussed—especially Quine's—to recognized positions within the field. He corrects the others—and again, especially Quine—about the nuances of those positions:

> Quine: This carries over to the point that Burt touched on earlier, namely the difference between ontology and epistemology. I consider myself a naïve realist when it comes to what there is. . .
> Dreben: You don't consider yourself a naïve realist in the technical sense. You consider yourself a realist. I mean you do not believe that everything, errors and all the rest, you perceive.
> Quine: I think everything is, with not a single exception.
> Dreben: That's true. But that is not a naïve realist (II, 4).

And third, Dreben encourages the other participants to return to, and himself often quotes from, the primary texts, causing the others to accuse him of being unduly "legalistic"—caring about the consistency of Quine's texts rather than engaging them in the moment about what they are currently saying. Quine: "These philosophical questions are so interesting that I think it's a pity to keep getting diverted into scholastic questions of exegesis" (III, 10). But Dreben maintains that his mastery of the texts gives him a better grasp *of* those positions. Here he is trying once again to explain the mutual containment thesis to Davidson:

> Would this help, the way Van put it in this essay "The Way the World Is"?[21] He really talks about the difference between questions

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[20]As Føllesdal would later criticize, Davidson's causal chains do not seem capable of uniquely fixing ontology, since in reality "causal trees" stem from each inquirer, intersecting at multiple branches (Føllesdal 1999, 725). Nevertheless, Davidson insisted that the triangulation situation reveals some of the necessary conditions for the emergence of propositional thought, which provides us reason to accept externalism: "Our thoughts neither create the world nor simply picture it; they are tied to their external sources from the beginning, those sources being the community and the environment we know we jointly occupy" (1999b, 732).

[21]This paper, written the March prior to the conference, was posthumously published in Quine (2008a).

of evidence and questions of fact. Questions of evidence is what I've been calling epistemology. He has it that questions of fact would be ontology, but not the general theory of ontology. That's the trouble. The general theory of ontology belongs to epistemology. That's what's been misleading. The given ontology is of course what the given science starts to do, but the theory of ontology is part of the theory of evidence (III, 5).

I think that these three points reveal a central component of Dreben's aptitude for philosophical conversation: he is vigilant in *grounding* the discussion by tying it to the views of other thinkers, to established philosophical positions, and to the primary texts. He is also confident in his own understanding of the philosophical stage. It is clear that he has read papers of Davidson that Quine has not, for instance, and seven years after the conference, Davidson faxed Dreben a letter which speaks to Dreben's conviction in his grasp of Quine's philosophy:

I'm sorry you didn't get the point; a few years ago, in Stanford, I thought you did. I never thought (or said) Quine *thought* observation sentences were about patterns of stimulation, nor did I ever say they were. What I argued was that his observation sentences weren't necessarily about rabbits either. Quine said they were about rabbits; but following out his instructions for determining meaning, it didn't turn out to be so. I know you think everyone else misreads Quine, but you are going to have a hard time convincing me in this case. (Davidson to Dreben, January 13 1993, WVQP, Item 315)

Dreben also proves to be an extremely cautious interlocutor, opposing too-quick endorsement or agreement, which he believes may obscure deeper disagreement: "Are you running ahead? What we're doing is simply posing the question" (III, 13); "Your [Davidson's] answer to the Stroud question... I got lost. It seemed to me you were saying the skeptic was right" (IV, 5); "But that is for Van. You must understand we're using words differently" (IV, 35); "I'm lost. I grant that we use the notion of cause in serious science. For the moment, I grant that" (IV, 42). He labors to unpack how others are using their words:

There are a few little terminological points that I want to clear up. Donald, you use "interpretation" to mean a mapping of linguistic forms onto objects, is that right?... And "translation" means mapping linguistic forms to linguistic forms? (II, 15–16).

He strives always to develop clear statements of the position or positions under discussion, for he knows that questions can look different, or even be unintelligible, from different perspectives:

In whose theory? From my viewpoint Stroud's question is only interesting, has any content, relative to either Van's project or Davidson's project or a third project. It's no absolute question (IV, 28).

And again later:

Yes, but we were asking for Don to answer it within Quinean theory. I said this was an exercise in Phil 140. I formulated a question within the Quinean approach. The assumption is that we all understand the Quinean approach even if we think it's wrong. Now we're asking what are you going to do? Are you going to apply the words "true" and "false" to these theories? Are you going to deny it, and on what grounds within the Quinean framework? (V, 8).

Getting a sufficiently clear statement takes time and effort.

Davidson: I don't see how there's any answer to solipsism here.
Dreben: Not an answer, we're trying to formulate it. We're trying to formulate it from the Quinean perspective...
Davidson: Well I hear you agreeing but I don't see what the response to Stroud is.
Dreben: We don't have one yet. We're trying to make sense of it in certain terms. (IV, 34).

Dreben is especially alert to the potential significance of small shifts, and how effecting what initially seems to be a quick fix in one part of a view may result in trouble elsewhere.

Finally, while Dreben does not dominate discussion, he is quite forthright about his own agenda:

I would like to stay with what I think are the interesting questions. What I think is the interesting question by the third day is that we

have two different theories being sketched, and I want us to keep going in that direction—about how Van will keep his theory going, and how Don will keep his going. And they're both looking from somewhat different perspectives too, it's coming out (IV, 27).

He judiciously compliments his interlocutors when their goals align with his own:

> But that's really your [Davidson's] question. You're not taking for granted, and that's a very good approach. We say blithely that they are non-compatible. . . and yet at the same time they have exactly the same "empirical consequences," And you're now asking, "Does that make sense?" (V, 36).

In sum, I think we can find much of the methodology of our own subdiscipline—the history of analytic philosophy—in Dreben's conversational style. He finds philosophical value in carefully and slowly attending to the context of the recent past, and to closely reading and interpreting primary texts. It would be impossible to work through the transcript of the Stanford meetings and not be struck by Dreben's key role, and how much both Quine and Davidson benefitted from his questions, reminders, nudges, and emendations.[22]

5. Conclusion: The Historiographical Stakes of the Conversationalists

In his retrospective paper "A Half Century of Philosophy, Viewed from Within," Hilary Putnam reflected on the intellectual culture at Harvard in the period from 1965 until the 1990s, writing that

> Although every one of my colleagues at Harvard has influenced my thinking, I propose to focus exclusively on three tendencies that are still represented in the Harvard department and that I believe to be important for the development of philosophy (and not

just "analytic" philosophy) as a whole. One of these tendencies is virtually identical with the philosophy of an individual, that is W. V. Quine. The same is true for the second of these tendencies; it is essentially the philosophy of John Rawls. And the third, which has to do with the continuing interest in Wittgenstein's later philosophy at Harvard, was represented by at least three members of the department when I joined it: Rogers Albritton, Stanley Cavell, and Burton Dreben (Putnam 1997, 187).

While I applaud Putnam's choice to tell history in terms of philosophical tendencies, I think we should resist his identification of tendencies with the philosophy of individuals—in particular, of Harvard's naturalism with Quine alone. Doing so may be a convenient shorthand, but it is not an innocent one, for it serves to disguise the discursive practice of philosophy. Neither Quine nor Rawls was an intellectual island, a singular great mind issuing philosophical proclamations that others studied. Their views emerged through conversations with others, and were sharpened by the otherwise invisible labor of conversationalists like Dreben.

Writing Dreben into our history gives us the opportunity to reflect upon the limits of, and the limitations imposed by, philosophical conversation. He brought to the table an encyclopedic knowledge of the source texts of several key figures in Harvard's orbit. But a condition for achieving such knowledge is adopting a relatively narrow focus. Dreben restricted his attention to a small subset of the numerous philosophers who published on themes from Quine's and Davidson's philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century.[23] If we wish to avoid parochialism and cliquishness, we should question if there are voices that cannot be heard or who have not been invited to contribute to our conversation.

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[22]Although my focus here has been on Dreben, it is clear that Føllesdal, too, contributes much to the conference.

[23]As Stuart Shanker writes, "Philosophy's continuing fascination with Quine's indeterminacy of translation argument is itself quite fascinating. With so many different sceptical problems to choose from, why should philosophers be so obsessed with translating 'gavagai'?" (1996, 215). Shanker is not exaggerating: a quick JStor search of "radical translation + Quine" returns more than 1000 articles.

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