The Bigger Picture

Introduction

In his book <u>Facing Facts</u> Stephen Neale presents us with a big picture.[1] It is a picture that has at its centre *facts*. Facts are what lie at the other end (so to speak) of representations. And, as Neale writes in the opening sentence of his book, "the idea that one thing might represent another is the cornerstone of modern philosophy". The philosophical debates in which facts play a leading role include debates about correspondence theories of truth, the dualism of scheme and content, realism and scepticism (to mention only a few). Neale has done an important job in identifying the role that facts have played in modern philosophy. Neale also thinks he can show that, if we are careful in the way that Russell was – and, arguably, the early Wittgenstein and Austin were not – facts can continue to have a role to play in philosophical debate. This runs counter to much of the work of Donald Davidson, who has persuasively argued that facts are not required by a satisfactory theory of truth. Furthermore, and significantly as far as Neale's book is concerned, Davidson has claimed, following an argument he finds in Frege's work, that there can be at most One Great Fact. It is on this argument that the core of Neale's defense of facts rests.

Much of Neale's book is concerned with the Slingshot argument, an argument so-called because of its resemblance to David's encounter with Goliath: a small weapon (in this case a rather elegantly simple argument) is used to bring down a rather powerful idea (in this case the existence of facts).[2] The power of the idea is evidenced in the role that facts and their corresponding representations have in modern philosophy. It is not clear precisely what is driving Neale's work here. Is it a desire to resuscitate the giant? Or is Neale just filling out a picture that starts with Russell's theory of descriptions and ends up in conflict with much contemporary philosophy of language and its concomitant metaphysics? Perhaps it is simply a fascination with the weapon itself that drives Neale. Whatever the motivation, it is clear that Neale places his work in opposition to that of Davidson.[3] Davidson's work acts as a kind of framing device for the whole book. Neale states it to be one of his aims to ascertain how much there is to the critique of representationalism; and his strategy is to "submit Davidson's arguments against facts to

[1]   S. Neale, <u>Facing Facts</u> (hereafter <u>F.F.</u>), Oxford University Press (Oxford) 2000. I am grateful to the following people for comments on a slightly earlier version of this paper: Alex Orenstein, Adrian Moore, Penelope Mackie, Christopher Kirwan, Lesley Brown and Howard Robinson.

[2]   The term "Slingshot" is a relatively recent invention due to the work of Barwise and Perry (see, e.g. "Semantic Innocence and Uncompromising Situations", in P.A. French, T. E. Uehling Jr., and H.K. Wettstein (eds) <u>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</u>, vi., (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press), 1981). Davidson employs a version of this argument that he finds in some remarks by Frege, leading to another way of referring this argument: the Frege argument (see, e.g. "True to the Facts", <u>Journal of Philosophy</u>, 66 (1969), pp. 748-769).

[3]   Neale actually opposes the work of Davidson and Richard Rorty, but I intend to uncouple these two and talk only of Davidson's work. Neale also has in his sights philosophers such as Strawson and Geach, but his central target is Davidson.

agonizing scrutiny".[4] This he does. The question one wants to ask is, How much should Davidson be bothered by Neale's defense of facts?

To some extent we know the answer to this question, as Neale has contributed to two volumes devoted to the work of Donald Davidson, in both cases drawing on work that was to become incorporated into Facing Facts and Davidson has replied to both papers.[5] Davidson is clear about his line of reply to Neale, but there is room for some expansion and that is what I hope to offer in this paper. As far as I can make out nothing of what *really* troubles Davidson is threatened by Neale's work here. I shall argue that, in his pursuit of facts Neale misses the bigger picture that Davidson offers us. The pursuit of facts takes us away from something that clearly *is* necessary to truth, meaning, knowledge, and the like: the existence of others. The pursuit of facts expends needless energy, and is fundamentally misguided. It opens up, for example, the possibility of many skepticisms, and for good reason - because it leaves out others. Neale concentrates on the formal aspects of Davidson's work, and he plays down the role of others. I shall argue that the role of others is what really lies at the heart of Davidson's work on truth and meaning. Indeed, it is through a careful understanding of the role of others that we can see why Davidson writes that "there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed".[6] I hope in this paper to explain this aspect of Davidson's work. Concentration on facts is just a wild goose chase.

Back to Russell

Since it is Russell that Neale is taking us back to, let us start with Russell. In particular, let us try to understand what motivated Russell's commitment to facts. In order to understand Russell's commitment to facts one really needs to go back to the very early Russell and his reaction against Bradley's (and indeed Russell's own) absolute idealism. Bradley's commitment to a harmonious and consistent unity (or Absolute) was the spur to Russell's commitment to a plurality of independent reals. Bradley's commitment to coherence was the spur to Russell's correspondence theory of truth. Where Russell was determined to set himself in opposition to Bradley, he was to find himself aligned with the work of G.E. Moore (another Cambridge philosopher working his way out of a commitment to Hegalianism as filtered down through Bradley and McTaggart). In his 1910-1911 lectures published under the title Some Main Problems of Philosophy Moore brings together talk of correspondence and talk of facts thus: "To say that this belief is true is to say that there is in the Universe *a* fact to which it corresponds,

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[4]   F.F., p. 7. Davidson makes it clear that without facts there is nothing for representations to represent. *Vide*, Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", Journal of Philosophy, 87 (1990), p. 304.
[5]   S. Neale, On Representing", in L.E. Hahn (ed.) The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, Chicago: Open Court (1999), pp. 657 – 666; and S. Neale, "From Semantics to Ontology", in U. Zeglen (ed.), Donald Davidson: Truth, Meaning and Knowledge, London: Routledge, pp 77 – 87.
[6]   Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in E. LePore (ed.) Truth and Interpretation, Oxford: Blackwell (1986), p.446.

and to say that it is false is to say that there is *not* in the Universe any fact to which it corresponds".[7] Facts lie at one end of the correspondence relation. And facts, for Moore, are real objects, albeit of a rather special sort. In his 1906 paper to the Aristotelian Society Russell suggests that a belief has objects that are united in the real world into a single complex or fact if that belief is true, but not otherwise. Arthur Prior suggests that Russell's work in the period 1906 to 1912 may have been a filling out of the early talk of Moore's.[8] And Russell, like Moore, is serious about the reality of the facts that correspond to our beliefs. This seriousness extends beyond this early period, so that we find Russell writing in 1918 "that the world contains *facts*, which are what they are whatever we may choose to think about them, and that there are also *beliefs*, which have reference to facts, and by reference to facts are either truth or false"…is one of those truisms which is "so obvious that it is laughable to mention them".[9] Russell is quite clear that in an inventory of the world facts would figure. Indeed in his 1959 account of his own philosophical development Russell continues to assert the existence of facts. He writes,

> Although I have changed my opinion on various matters since those early days, I have not changed on points which, then as now, seemed of most importance…I still hold that any proposition other than a tautology, if it is true, is true in virtue of a relation to a *fact*, and that facts in general are independent of experience. I see nothing impossible in a universe devoid of experience. On the contrary, I think that experience is a very restricted and cosmically trivial aspect of a very tiny portion of the universe. On all these matters my views have not changed since I abandoned the teachings of Kant and Hegel.[10]

Along with a commitment to facts, Russell here explains that he thinks of facts as existing in independence of our – or anyone's – experience. We could say that Russell here espouses a form of realism which I have in another place labeled *hard*.[11] One finds evidence of Russell's commitment to hard realism throughout his writings. So, for example, in "Truth and Experience" he writes: "there is no reason why 'truth' should not

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7 Some Main Problems of Philosophy, London (1953), p. 250.

8 A. Prior, "Correspondence Theory of Truth", entry in the Paul Edward's Encylopedia of Philosophy, Vol. II., Macmillan Publishing Co. & The Free Press, New York, 1967, p. 227

9 B. Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918), in Russell's Logic and Knowledge, Capricorn Books, New York, 1971, p, 182. Geach has suggested that the word "fact" was largely unknown before the turn of the 20th century and that it came into the language through journalism: "Once stated, the philosophy of facts flourished mightily, especially in Cambridge" (P. Geach, Logic Matters, University of California Press : Berkeley and Los Angeles, (1980), p. 21). Quine, too, notes the overlap between ordinary and philosophical use of the term; in both the word has the connotation of "unvarnished objectivity" (*vide* Quine, Word and Object, The M.I.T. Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts (1960), p. 247.

10 B. Russell, My Philosophical Development, Unwin Books:Great Britain (1959), pp. 49-50. It is, presumably, this attitude towards facts (filtered down to John Austin) that prompted P.F. Strawson to oppose: "[Facts] are not, like things or happenings on the face of the globe, witnessed or heard or seen, broken or overturned, interrupted or prolonged, kicked, destroyed, mended or noisy" ("Truth", in Strawson (ed.) Logical-Linguistic Papers, Methuen: London and New York (1980), p. 196)

11 A. Avramides, Other Minds, Routeldge:London & New York (2001), p. 89. Another way of referring to this form of realism is *robust* realism. I avoid this way of referring to this aspect of Russell's realism as it has other connotations in his work, having to do with Russell's reaction to Meinong. I am grateful to Alex Orenstein for pointing out a possible clash in terminology here.

be a wider conception than 'knowledge'.[12] And in "The Law of the Excluded Middle", he writes: "on the realist hypothesis there are …perhaps [other facts] which cannot be known at all".[13] And, finally, in "Truth and Verification" he writes: "If … we assert that there are true propositions that are not verifiable, we abandon pure empiricism. Pure empiricism, finally, is believed by no one, and if we are to retain beliefs that we all regard as valid, we must allow principles of inference which are neither demonstrative nor derivable from experience."[14] One can find commitment to hard realism peppered throughout the history of philosophy. One very clear example of it can be found in Locke's _Essay Concerning Human Understanding_. Thus, Locke writes:

> But how much these few and narrow inlets [i.e. sensation and reflection] are disproportionate to the vast whole Extent of all Beings, will not be hard to persuade those, who are not so foolish, as to think their span the measure of all Things.[15]

Locke is here only talking about a reality that transcends our, human, experience, but it is clear from the Essay that he would agree with Russell that reality may transcend _all_ experience. Another philosopher to agree with Russell and Locke is Thomas Nagel. Nagel is very clear about the extent of the realism he espouses. He writes:

> Any conception of the world must include some acknowledgement of its own incompleteness: at a minimum it will admit the existence of things or events we don't know about now. The issue is only about how far beyond our actual conception of the world we should admit that the world may extend. I claim that it may contain not only what we don't know and can't yet conceive, but also what we never could conceive – and that this acknowledgement of the likelihood of its own limits should be built into our conception of reality. This amounts to a strong form of anti-humanism: the world is not our world, even potentially.[16]

The acknowledgement of such a realism is, of course, not yet a commitment to facts. Neither Locke nor Nagel speak of them. But for Russell the world that exists in independent of experience is a world not just of objects, but also of facts.[17] The existence of facts is, according to Russell, quite clear if we look closely at language. A fact is the sort of thing that is expressed by a whole sentence. It is not to be confused with an object. The word "Socrates" does not express a fact, but the sentence "Socrates was a philosopher" does. A fact cannot be named - it can be asserted or denied, willed or wished or questioned; in short, it is expressed by a sentence. When we look at language what we find are words that denote, for example, relations that exist between real things.

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[12]   B. Russell, "Truth and Experience" in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth , Unwin Paperbacks: London (1980), p. 246.

[13]   B. Russell, "The Law of the Excluded Middle", in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 285.

[14]   B. Russell, "Truth and Verification", in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 305.

[15]   J. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, IV. iii. 23. I discuss Locke's hard realism in Other Minds, chapter iv.

[16]   T. Nagel, The View From Nowhere, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1986), p. 108.

[17]   In "Truth and Experience" Russell writes in such a way as to suggest that a realist view of truth entails the existence of facts, but surely this cannot be so.

These things and this relation form a complex whole which Russell calls 'a fact'. He notes: "Complete metaphysical agnosticism is not compatible with the maintenance of linguistic propositions".[18] In one place Russell claims that one of language's purposes is to *indicate* facts (the other two purposes are to express the state of the speaker, and to alter the state of the hearer).[19] Facts, writes Russell, "are whatever there is except what (if anything) is completely simple".[20] Whatever facts are, it is important for Russell that they belong to the objective world and are not created by our thoughts or beliefs. When we aim to know the world we aim, amongst other things, to know facts about it.

Russell's metaphysics embraces facts, and facts bring in their wake further commitments. One is to a metaphysical commitment to universals. Russell takes nominalism to be incompatible with the existence of facts. Another commitment is to a correspondence of theory of truth. This is facts being put to work: truth is a correspondence with the facts. Russell writes: "Many philosophers speak critically of the 'correspondence theory' of truth, but it always seemed to me that, except in logic and mathematics, no other theory had any chance of being right".[21] At times Russell writes in such a way as to suggest that correspondence theories are committed to facts, but this cannot be so (and, as we shall see below, Davidson gives us one way of understanding how these two commitments can come apart).

In the first flush of liberation from Kant and Hegel as filtered down through Bradley *et al*, Russell embraced a naïve realism (that is, his realism was both hard *and* naïve). As he puts it in one place: "I…rejoiced in the thought that grass really is green, in spite of the adverse opinion of all philosophers from Locke onwards".[22] But naïve realism proved to be nothing more than a transitional theory in Russell's ever developing philosophy. The move away from naïve realism is pithily summarized by Russell thus: "Naïve realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false."[23] What physics tells us is that what we experience cannot be the external world with which physics deals. For Russell the whole of what we perceive without inference is the private world of sense-data. For the rest – for the world we don't perceive but infer - Russell notes that we *instinctively* believe in it. Despite what physics tells us, Russell writes that what we instinctively believe is that "there *are* objects *corresponding* to our sense-data".[24] In Our Knowledge of the External World Russell embarks on the project of effecting a logical construction of matter from sense-data. He describes this project as a reconstruction of "the conception of matter without the *a priori* belief which historically gave rise to it".[25] Russell did not advance far in his project. Quine notes that Carnap's Aufbau in 1928 may

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18   B. Russell, My Philosophical Development, p. 112.
19   B. Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 112.
20   My Philosophical Development, p. 112.
21   Ibid, p. 98.
22   Ibid, p. 48.
23   An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 15.
24   Problems of Philosophy, p. 11.
25   Our Knowledge of the External World, p. 110. Russell here points out that the permanence of things is not required by science. Nevertheless, our ordinary belief has it that objects are permanent and independent of out sense-data, and Russell thinks that his logical construction can give "the only justification possible" of our ordinary belief. This construction is Russell's way of "bridging the gulf between the world of physics and the world of sense" (Ibid, p. 106).

be considered to have been inspired by, as well as to be the sequel to, Russell's work here.[26] Quine also notes Russell's acknowledgement that, in order to effect the construction, he had to take for granted the existence of other minds. The belief in the existence of other minds, according to Russell, is another of our natural, instinctive, beliefs. An instinctive belief is one thing, but it has proved quite another thing to set this belief on the firm foundation of justification.[27] As far as our knowledge of the external world is concerned Russell is clear that, however far we can go in justifying our belief in it, there is always a sense that what we have is an hypothesis – a good working hypothesis that serves us well. The same can also be said of our belief in the existence of others.

It is not necessary to chart Russell's journey away from naïve realism further here. As well as moving away from naïve realism, Russell also moved away from an expansive ontology in the direction of a more parsimonious one (helped here by Occam's razor). His commitment to facts and to a correspondence theory of truth withstand both of these moves.

In summary, Russell's commitment to facts is part of his rejection of Hegelian-Bradleian unity of internal relations in favour of a variety of realisms, all of which may be said to be hard in the sense defined above. Russell's reasons for espousing facts come from his examination of language and a view about what must be the case in the world in order for our sentences to be true or false. The language that we must look at is not the everyday language of commerce, but the rarefied, ideal, language of the logician. A description of the world in this ideal language will give us an account of what the world is like. This is a world independent of us and of our language; it is a world that can be taken to exist despite acknowledged difficulties in our knowledge of its existence. He also puts facts to work in a correspondence theory of truth. And, once again, such a theory of truth plays its part in a pluralist, non-holistic view of the world; truth has nothing to do with how our beliefs hang together in a system, it has nothing to do with coherence as the neo-Hegelians wanted us to believe.

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[26] *Vide* Quine, "Russell's Ontological Development", in D. Pears (ed.) Bertrand Russell: A Collection of Critical Essays, Doubleday Anchor: New York (1972), p. 303.

[27] Russell writes: "In actual fact, whatever we may try to think as philosophers, we cannot help believing in the minds of other people, so that the question whether our belief is justified has a merely speculative interest. And if it is justified, then there is no further difficulty of principle in that vast extension of our knowledge, beyond our own private data, which we find in science and common sense" (Our Knowledge of the External World, p. 104). This is a big "if". At the end of the day, Russell can really do no better that to point out that we *do* believe in the existence of others (instinctively) and, given this, we are in a position to construct the world.

From Russell to Davidson

Quine wrote: "The word 'fact' is commonplace enough, but where the philosophical motivation enters is in choosing to admit facts as objects rather than fob the word off with the lower-grade sort of treatment accorded to 'sake' and 'mile'." This comment on facts occurs in a section of <u>Word & Object</u> entitled "entia non grata".[28] Quine could see no need for facts, and he believed they engendered philosophical mistakes. Davidson followed in his teacher's footsteps. He could have stuck with the observation that there is no need for facts, but Davidson expanded on his reason for rejecting facts. Davidson mounts what Neale, in effect, sees as a 2-pronged attack on facts.[29] One prong involves the Slingshot argument, and it is the prong with which Neale is most concerned. The other prong concerns the requirements of a Tarski-style theory of truth. This prong represents less of an attack on facts than a challenge. The challenge is to show that an adequate theory of truth requires facts. The work Davidson has done is designed to show that adequacy is reached with an ontology only of objects and events. Although it is the first prong of Davidson's attack that concerns Neale more, Neale does some work to try to undermine Davidson's confidence that an adequate theory of truth need invoke no more than objects and events in its ontology. I take it that Neale's strategy is to launch a 2-pronged attack on Davidson: not only is there a defensible line on facts that can dodge the slingshot, but also there is reason to hold that one's theory of truth requires a more ample ontology than Davidson allows. In effect, Neale believes that language requires facts and there is a defensible line one can take on facts. But I am not convinced that Neale has yet got to the heart of the matter in the way that he has identified the issues here.

Let us begin by briefly looking at how Davidson constructs his theory of truth and, thereby, arrives at his favoured ontology. In effect, Davidson argues that reference to facts is otiose in a Tarski-style theory of truth. What a Tarski-style theory of truth *is* committed to is reference axioms (for more on reference, see below). Furthermore – and crucially - the theory uses the idea of satisfaction for dealing with predicates. Satisfiers are sequences of objects and, therefore, invoke no new entities over and above the objects assigned in the reference axioms. By invoking satisfaction in the theory of truth Davidson finds a way of avoiding reference to facts; what, in effect, takes the place of facts is satisfaction. The idea here is that if an ontological commitment is not required in the construction of a Tarski-style theory of truth-meaning, then it is not required. Along with facts, an adequate theory need have no truck with state of affairs, situations, propositions or properties. Davidson writes: "Theory of truth based on satisfaction is instructive partly because it is less ambitious about what it packs into the entities to which sentences correspond: in such a theory, these entities are no more than arbitrary pairings of the objects over which the variables of the language range with those variables. Relative simplicity in the objects is offset by the trouble it takes to explain the relation between

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[28]   Quine, <u>Word and Object</u>, p. 246.

[29]   Neale does not set things up in quite this way (hence the "in effect"). Neale does focus attention on the two aspects of Davidson's work that I am about to outline; however, he is not altogether clear about how these two lines of his discussion fit together.

them and sentences…."[30] What the theory of truth involving satisfaction and one involving facts have in common, says Davidson, is that both "intend to express a relation between language and the world".[31] This is where the similarity ends. Contrary to Davidson, Neale suggests that a theory of truth may need more. He cites a sentence that appears to require mention of predicates ('This colour is the same as that'), and he returns to an issue over which much ink has been spilt: the question of causal statements (e.g. 'The short-circuit caused the fire'). Neale thinks he has found a place for properties and facts in our ontology – and he has done this by looking at language. But, as Davidson has pointed out, it is not language alone that is crucial here but the Tarski-style theory of truth. It is *here* that Davidson sees no need. Indeed, in his reply to Neale, Davidson points out that Neale has yet to show how a Tarski-style theory of truth can accommodate this expanded ontology.[32]

But Davidson has done more than claim that there is no need for an expanded ontology. He takes there to be an argument, one that can be found in Frege's work, to the effect that facts don't exist.[33] Davidson makes much of this argument in a paper devoted to a defense of a version of the correspondence theory of truth. The argument does not show that there are no facts, but can be taken to show that there is at most one Great Fact. Davidson was quick to note that the conclusion of the Frege argument only follows if one accepts the principles on which it was based. And he also notes that "one can certainly imagine constructing facts in ways that might reflect some of our feelings for the problem without leading to ontological collapse".[34] Although Davidson did not expand at the time, such comments lead one to suspect that he would not be *too* surprised by Neale's work. For, after all, one of the things that Neale claims to have shown is that close attention to slingshot arguments are valuable because "they impose very definite constraints on what theories of facts…must look like".[35]

But trying to find a role for facts is beside the larger Davidsonian point. Davidson's rejection of facts must ultimately be understood in connection with his social account of language. Neale overlooks this further reason for Davidson's rejection of facts. Not only is there no need for them, and not only may there not be enough of them, but the pursuit of facts takes us away from something that clearly *is* necessary to truth, to meaning and to knowledge: the existence of others. To see this, it may be useful to return to what Davidson says about the construction of the theory of truth.

In one place Davidson writes: "What Tarski has done for us is show in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make, whether in language or in thought. What we need to do now is to say how to identify the presence of such a pattern or structure in

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[30] D. Davidson, "True to the Facts", p. 49.

[31] Ibid, p. 48.

[32] Thus, the qualifier "Tarski-style" is doing quite a lot of work for Davidson. *Vide* D. Davidson, "Reply to Neale" in U. Zeglen (ed.) Donald Davidson: Truth, Meaning and Knowledge, Routledge: London and New York (1999), p.89.

[33] Davidson has never been entirely clear about the relationship between the observation that a Tarski-style theory of truth does not require facts and the argument derived from Frege to the effect that there is only one Great Fact. I am taking it that these are separable arguments. Either one might have been used on its own, but together they strengthen the case against facts.

[34] Davidson, "True to the Facts", p. 43.

[35] S. Neale, "On Representing", in L.E. Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Donald Davidson, Open Court: Chicago and La Salle, Illinois (1999), p. 662. In F.F. Neale narrows this down to what he calls the Descriptive Constraint.

the behaviour of people".[36] Some philosophers have paid much attention to the "kind of pattern" that truth must make, while down playing the need to identify this pattern in the behaviour of people. The move from a mere pattern to *used* pattern is the move from truth in some language or other to truth for a given language. The key is to understand the relationship of words to sentences. The Tarski-style truth theory explains how the words, drawn from a finite vocabulary, can be combined to yield true sentences, the T-sentences of the theory. The correctness of the theory is tested by our observation of how speakers use their language; it is tested at the level of the sentence. The theory is tied down to speakers at the level of the sentence. Unless we understand this, there will be a temptation to take the theory to be tied down to the world internally: we will take reference and satisfaction to be relations that hold independent of and prior to the use of the sentence.[37] It is if we do this that we will feel the need to posit facts. But as Davidson sees things reference and satisfaction are mere posits. We work our way back to them once we've understood the way the sentences of the language are used by its speakers. He writes, "Nothing would count as a sentence, and the concept of truth would therefore have no application, if there were not creatures who used sentences by uttering or inscribing them".[38] Until we have connected the theory with speakers, the theory of truth is incomplete. And once we have connected the theory with the speakers we can begin to understand relations such as reference and satisfaction. The relation words bear to the world is mediated by the relation one speaker bears to another. It is this that Russell and Neale miss. For them words have their own relationship to the world, unmediated and unsustained by the linguistic intercourse of speakers. It is here that we encounter the real difference between the picture that Neale is presenting us with and Davidson's. Neale downplays the incompleteness of the theory of truth, and he underestimates the role played by speakers of the language. As a result he tries to resuscitate a role for facts and their corresponding representations. Of course Neale appreciates that languages are used in social intercourse, but in terms of the Homeric Struggle identified some time ago by P.F. Strawson, Neale and Russell would line up on the side of those who do not place speakers at the heart of their account of truth.[39]

If we look back to that Homeric Struggle identified by Strawson we may be somewhat surprised to find Davidson also placed on the side of those who exclude speakers from the very heart of the account of truth. A more careful reading of Davidson (perhaps with a pinch of hindsight) reveals that Strawson may not have correctly

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[36]   Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 295. I here telescope a lengthy debate. Suffice it to say that my concern in this paper is *Davidson* and the way he looks at the concept of truth, and to highlight the difference with what Neale is doing.

[37]   Cf. Davidson: "Within the theory, the conditions of truth of a sentence are specified by adverting to postulated structure and semantic concepts like that of satisfaction or reference. But when it comes to interpreting the theory as a whole, it is the notion of truth, as applied to closed sentences, which must be connected with human ends and activities" ("Reality without Reference", in Davidson (ed.) Truth and Interpretation, Clarendon Press: Oxford (1984), p. 221-222). Cf. also Davidson, "Epistemology and Truth", in Davidson (ed.) Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective, Clarendon Press: Oxford (2001), p. 180.

[38]   "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 300. Or again: "Reference and…satisfaction are theoretical…; there is no question of their 'correctness' beyond whether they yield a satisfactory account of the truth conditions of sentences and the relations among sentences", "Epistemology and Truth", p. 181.

[39]   See P.F. Strawson, "Meaning and Truth", in Strawson (ed.) Logico-Linguistic Papers, pp. 170 - 189.

identified all the players in this struggle. Strawson lines up Davidson with Frege, the early Wittgenstein, and Chomsky, while opposing these philosophers with the likes of Grice, Austin and the later Wittgenstein. In another place I have argued that it is clear that Davidson is in many respects – and especially in his later work - closer to Grice and the later Wittgenstein than Strawson appreciated.[40] What may have misled Strawson is Davidson's emphasis, in his early writing, on a theory of truth which is revealing of sentential structure. But as the years have passed Davidson has filled out the picture. The theory is still a part of it, but the bigger picture makes reference to the social aspects of truth and of meaning.

The bigger picture is one well understood by, for example, Bjorn Ramberg. In his book on Davidson, Ramberg writes: "The possibility of giving a theoretical description of linguistic competence by way of a formalization of language…becomes linked to the relative importance to communication of the abstracted synchronic aspects of language on the one hand and the diachronic or dynamic aspects on the other".[41] Ramberg here appreciates the proper place of a Tarski-style theory of truth, and its essential incompleteness. He emphasizes as well the diachronic, dynamic nature of the social aspects of language. If we understand these two equally important aspects of language, then we should not be surprised when we find Davidson writing: "there is no such thing as a language, not if language is anything like what philosophers and linguists have supposed".[42] The philosophers and linguists to whom Davidson here refers are those who miss – or misunderstand – the social aspects of language. They miss the application of the theory to *natural* languages.[43]

Another philosopher who understood the bigger picture from the beginning is Carol Rovane.[44] Indeed, Rovane's understanding of the bigger picture leads her to criticize Davidson's predilection for drawing metaphysical conclusions from the theory of meaning. Rovane argues that, although Davidson can use reflection on the theory of meaning to argue against relativism and the possibility of global error, he cannot get from the theory further insight into the metaphysics of what it is that we all agree about – categories such as substance, event, cause and person. Further metaphysical insight would be garnered if Davidson emphasized not so much the theory of meaning as the concept of communication. Rovane insists that it is only when we examine the latter that our real metaphysical commitments are revealed. In urging this shift of emphasis on Davidson, Rovane reveals a true appreciation of the place of others in Davidson's work. It is in his recognition of the importance of others with whom we are in communication that Rovane sees Davidson's advance on the work of Kant. Where Kant appreciates the

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[40] "Davidson, Grice and the social aspects of language", in G. Cosenza (ed.), <u>Paul Grice's Heritage</u>, Brepols (2001), pp. 115 - 138.

[41] B. T. Ramberg, <u>Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language</u>, Basil Blackwell (1989), p. 53. For a thorough and illuminating discussion of the diachronic, dynamic aspects of language see ch. 8 of Ramberg's book.

[42] Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in E. Lepore (ed.) <u>Truth and Interpretation</u>, p. 446.

[43] Cf. Davidson: "It is important to stress that a theory of truth for a natural language (as I conceive it) differs widely in both aim and interest from Tarski's truth definition. Sharpness of application is lost, and with it most of what concerns mathematicians and logicians….", "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics", in Davidson (ed.) Truth and Interpretation, p. 204. See also, "The structure and Content of Truth", pp. 300-301.

[44] C. Rovane, "The Metaphysics of Interpretation", in E. LePore (ed.) <u>Truth and Interpretation</u>, pp. 415 – 429.

symbiotic cleavage of the subjective and the objective, Davidson has taken a leaf out of a later book of Wittgenstein's and appreciates that one cannot recognize one's subjective point of view on the world in independence of a recognition of other subjective points of view. "Rationality", writes Davidson, "is a social trait. Only communicators have it".[45] The role of others emerges when one examines the concept of communication. It is not clear to me that Davidson goes in for quite the division Rovane claims to see between the theory of meaning and the concept of communication. If we take Davidson's words at face value, then the concept of communication is an essential part of the theory of truth and meaning. Looked at like this, Rovane need only have reminded us of the important role played by the concept of communication in Davidson's work.

Facing Facts again?

The rejection of facts often signals a rejection of a correspondence theory of truth. Davidson rejects facts but, for some time at least, wanted to hold on to a correspondence theory of truth. One reason philosophers sometimes give for rejecting a correspondence theory of truth is that it makes no sense to suggest that it is somehow possible to compare one's beliefs and words with the world those beliefs and words are about. Davidson, however, does not see this as a particularly good reason for rejecting this account of truth; the correspondence theorist, he points out, often espouses a form of realism that holds that truth is independent of our beliefs. Davidson is certainly correct as far as Russell is concerned (*vide supra*). Indeed, Davidson himself once maintained a correspondence theory of truth on the grounds that he espoused this same form of realism.[46] Strikingly, at this point in his philosophical development Davidson shared with Russell both a commitment to a correspondence theory of truth and a realism committed to the existence of a reality which can be thought to exist in independence of what anyone believes or can know about it. And all this *despite* a disagreement with Russell over facts.

But talk about correspondence was bound to lead to misunderstanding, and in due course Davidson decided to drop the talk. To be fair, whenever he spoke of correspondence Davidson had been very careful to explain what he meant; it was never the case that he accepted facts. Realism is a little trickier. Davidson has come to believe that, in so far as realism requires "radically non-epistemic correspondence", it "asks more of truth than we can understand".[47] Davidson now maintains that what he ultimately wanted from talk of realism was some sort of opposition to *anti*-realism. Opposition to anti-realism still drives Davidson. His main objection to anti-realism is that it deprives

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[45]   "Rational Animals", in Davidson (ed.) <u>Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective</u>, p. 105.
[46]   "Truth", writes Davidson, " (except in special circumstances) is independent of what anyone believes or can know", "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 304.
[47]   Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 309.

truth of its role as an intersubjective standard.[48] But Davidson no longer thinks that he must maintain realism in order to oppose anti-realism. His preferred stance is to reject *both* realism *and* anti-realism. In the place of these well-trodden paths Davidson sets out to explain the workings of the theory of truth and, thereby, the concept of truth. He takes the key here to be an appreciation of the fact that what is to be explained is a social phenomenon. We are back with a recognition of the place of others. What recognition of others gives us is a way of triangulating truth: "The ultimate source of both objectivity and communication is the triangle that, by relating speaker, interpreter, and the world, determines the contents of thought and speech".[49] It is in *this* sense that truth is not independent of what anyone believes or can know. Truth is our truth. But we must be careful. As Davidson constantly reminds us: "there is not room [here] for a relativized concept of truth".[50]

Davidson may not call himself a realist, but neither is he an anti-realist. For my money, he is *on the side of* the realists (although not the *hard* realists). But it is not a realism that would appeal to Russell, and I doubt it appeals to Neale. Russell, as we have seen, was driven by a rejection of neo-Hegelian coherence, and Davidson agrees in wanting no truck with that. What Russell does seem to hold is a realism that transcends both our knowledge and our language. Transcending our knowledge is a tricky one, but on one understanding of this idea at least Davidson would now disagree. And it is clear that Davidson would find Russell's belief that reality transcends our language totally unacceptable. And it is in our use of language that the need for others is evident. The debate about facts sharpens the debate about realism. As Davidson writes: "The correct objection to correspondence theories is not, then, that they make truth something to which we humans can never legitimately aspire; the real objection is rather that such theories fail to provide entities to which truth vehicles…can be said to correspond.[51] As he once put it, "Nothing, not *thing*, makes our sentences or theories true…".[52] Truth is the upshot of our interactions with others in the world. Where Russell thought the ideal language gives us a description of a world independent of us and our language, Davidson turns to *natural* language and through it sees the world.[53]

Conclusion

There is nothing in <u>Facing Facts</u> to urge Davidson in the direction of facts. Neale is right to see that the stakes are high. The rejection of facts brings in its wake the

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[48] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 309.
[49] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 325.
[50] <u>Ibid</u>.
[51] "The Structure and Content of Truth", p. 304.
[52] D. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", in <u>Truth and Interpretation</u>, p. 194.
[53] "We perceive the world through language, that is, through having language", Davidson, "Seeing Through Language", in J. Preston (ed.) <u>Thought and Language</u>, Cambridge University Press (1997), pp. 15-29. We must be careful how we understand this "through". Davidson explains that he means it to be read along the lines of "by dint of".

demise of the correspondence theory of truth, the dualism of scheme and content, scepticism and a variety of realisms. And once the case against facts is made, as Neale says, the case against representations comes more or less for free. It looks to me that Davidson has his case against facts. The case is not, ultimately, based on a formal argument (although that helps things along nicely). The case rests upon an appreciation of the place of others in our account of truth and meaning.