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DESCARTES AND AN INDIFFERENT DECEIVER

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The aim of this paper is to show how and why the method of radical interpretation, proposed by Donald Davidson, can solve the problems that are formulated in a variety of skeptical scenarios. In particular, the method of radical interpretation deprives Cartesian skeptical scenario (both in its traditional and recent versions) all its force and even the status of philosophical problem. Appealing to the difference between intended and unintended lies one can see how the global skeptical scenario gets solved in both cases. The paper also formulates an argument in favor of expanded version of naturalized epistemology that was offered by W. V. O. Quine – first of all, due to the introduction of social factors. In particular, there are always at least two necessary limitations imposed by the communication on our hypothesis about the knowledge and delusion. In addition, the article explains the need for a moderate externalism (both perceptual and social) to the variants of Descartes and Hume's skeptical scenario.

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1. The naturalization of epistemology proposed by W. V. O. Quine – if we consider epistemology to be a core of Western philosophy – implies the naturalization of philosophy in general, with the whole range of issues it brings with it. A naturalized account of knowledge, as Quine believed, should either remove some epistemological problems as not worthy of serious consideration or pass them under the jurisdiction of special sciences that would deal with them in the context of empirical research. Philosophy itself, therefore, should be just a continuation of these sciences, being based on the knowledge that they have provided[1]. Primarily, such a situation concerns the problems of philosophical skepticism. A naturalized account of knowledge and meaning, according to Richard Rorty, should deprive the skeptic of her usual arguments aimed at normative justification, but not at empirical description, of our beliefs (Davidson, 2001a: 156). Surely, such an account seems to the skeptic a question-begging strategy, for it is one more version of empiricism she presents her claims to – and not without good reason, as was pointed out by Donald Davidson. Quine's naturalized epistemology, as Davidson indicated, not only does not provide any satisfactory answer to skepticism, but, moreover, directly leads to it. The Quinean version of naturalization merely offers new suspicious epistemological intermediaries between our beliefs and the world. An explanation of this causal connection in terms of experience, sense-data or sensory stimuli can not provide full-blown justification for our beliefs, since, as was famously held, the only reason for a belief could be just another belief (Ibid.: 141). At the same time, a coherent totality of our beliefs also does not provide a solution to the problem skepticism, if it implies, as before, an opposition of beliefs and the world. Thus, Davidson proposed his own version of naturalized epistemology based on a minimalist analysis of linguistic meanings and non-reductive naturalism with respect to the mind (Ibid.: 140). However, since then such an account has attracted much criticism based on an unfortunate misunderstanding of some main ideas in his anti-skeptical argumentation. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to show and explain how Davidson's method of radical interpretation might cope with the problems

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[1] However, today we can observe a certain naturalization of the natural science itself – first of all, in the guise of sociology of science. Of course, this is not a step back, but rather a development of Quinean program of naturalization of the knowledge.

posed by some well-known skeptical scenarios. However, for this purpose, we should first treat Quinean naturalization in a much broader sense.

Nowadays it's more or less accepted among philosophers that there is no need to give a direct answer to the skeptic. Instead, for philosophers it would be wise to offer a conceptual solution, or therapy, of the skeptical problems. Davidson, nonetheless, tried to give a direct response, taking thereby, like Barry Stroud, skepticism seriously (Stroud, 2000c: 38). However, unlike Stroud, he considered skeptical doubts about knowledge as fully solvable, though not quite in the sense of conceptual therapy. It seems that for Davidson to seek to refute the skeptic, directly or indirectly, is just to dramatize the situation. There *is* a possibility to give a direct response, but only if the skeptic's hypothesis is really a *question*. Indeed, as Davidson stated, Richard Rorty, for example, "sees the history of Western philosophy as a confused and victorless battle between unintelligible skepticism and lame attempts to answer it", the battle that came to an end along with the epistemological project in general. Davidson, however, considered epistemology from Descartes to Quine as "just one complex, and by no means unilluminating, chapter in the philosophical enterprise". And today this 'chapter' gives way to something better in terms of "modes of analysis and adherence to standards of clarity that have always distinguished the best philosophy" (Davidson, 2001a: 156 – 157). Of course, this indicates a difference in their assessments of the role and significance of skepticism for philosophy, but that is against the background of a more general agreement.

Using the difference Wilfrid Sellars held between the manifest and scientific image of a man in the world, we might say that skepticism can be considered as a mediator between the two images (Sellars, 1963: 1). As a rule, the skeptic challenges some obvious beliefs that are the part of the common sense of her time. However, she does this bearing in mind the second, scientific image. In other words, using the paradoxes she tries to show the inadequacy and imperfection of the manifest image. Indeed, skeptical scenarios always, in one way or another, depend on the needs of the time represented in both images. It is for this reason that these scenarios often seem out of date after every change in our common worldview under the influence of scientific discoveries.

For example, Pyrrhonian tropes were directed against the naïve belief that properties of things were naturally inherent and independent from the ways people perceive them. However, some time later this problematic become irrelevant, because all the reasons for the changes listed in the tropes could be

explained by, for example, medicine. Agrippan tropes, on the other hand, were intended to show that a purely logical justification of our knowledge is insufficient and incomplete. Descartes' scenario pointed out the inadequacy of the conception of the world as an open 'book of nature' that can be read directly through the evidence of senses. In other words, it was directed against a conception of the world that could be directly seen, heard and touched. The method of universal doubt was the expression of another view on the world. This view was focused primarily on the exact calculation and mathematization of unobservable, but comprehended only by reason laws of nature. The Humean scenario, however, was designed to show the inadequacy of the very scientific world picture of modern philosophy. This time the findings about the laws of physical world were faced with the problems raised by the human nature of our mind.

Of course, the ways in which the most prominent skeptical scenarios relate to the relevant periods between scientific revolutions and changes in the scientific worldview deserve a special investigation. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the close relationship between philosophy and the growth of scientific knowledge often predetermines the extent to which some philosophical arguments and scenarios seem convincing, and also how and why these scenarios lose their persuasiveness.

2. Now, if we return to the beginning of the mentioned 'chapter' in the history of Modern philosophy, we can use the Cartesian skeptical scenario and its contemporary version – the Brain-in-a-Vat hypothesis – as an illustration of a widened view regarding the naturalization of epistemological problems.

The Cartesian skeptical scenario was based on the assumption that the total illusion might be the result of an *intentional* action. It is no accident that Descartes in his *Meditations* moves from ordinary cases of misleading perception to lies of other people and only after that to the hypothesis of the Omniscient Deceiver. If we are not confident in our knowledge about the world, it is because of *his* will. Indeed, if there were no one behind the illusion, no author, could we consider this unintentional self-deception as a reason for philosophical skepticism? In fact, human perception naturally obscures and even distorts many aspects of our world. For example, it is natural that we don't see the molecular structure of things. Today most of these objective distortions are the subject matter of the psychology of perception. Moreover, sometimes there is no suitable cognitive capacity or instrument to register certain features of our environment. In any case, in every situation factors that determine our knowledge not only distort, but also form our perception of

reality, making thereby our perspective essentially human. However, unlike the Cartesian scenario these distortions usually do not threaten us, because they don't undermine our knowledge of reality, but are the natural presuppositions for it. Even if we consider these presuppositions as restrictions of our knowledge, the overcoming of these restrictions in the future will yield us only ordinary knowledge of our world, that is, – scientific, not philosophical. We can say, therefore, that Nature is no more than an 'indifferent' deceiver that seems to put forward only solvable riddles. Indeed, there are many kinds of the 'indifferent' deception in the world – mimicry, for example, is only one of them. It follows then, that to count Cartesian skeptical doubt as an inductive generalization of some situations, these situations must presuppose the intentional lies of other people, and not only perceptual distortions. Indeed, it seems that people could lie to me almost in everything; I could be a victim of a conspiracy.

However, no matter how complicated that conspiracy could be, it would be just one more ordinary possibility. In other words, debates between the skeptics and their opponents are not about the possibility of total illusion and therefore not about our intuition of that illusion. In fact, they disagree about whether this possibility is interesting from the philosophical point of view, or is it merely ordinary (virtual reality, drugs etc.) and *solvable* from the practical, or technical, point of view. Obviously, the skeptic is interested in scenarios that are inherently unsolvable. In other words, she prefers scenarios of paradox. Hence, provided we can model the skeptical hypothesis or create conditions for its occurrence and detection with the help of science, it becomes (at least potentially) solvable and uninteresting. In other words, we can create conditions for both its appearance and detection. It would seem that the problem of technical solvability is of a secondary importance here. But in fact, the a priori character of skeptical argument itself depends on it. To the objection of the skeptic that she has in mind only the logical possibility of total illusion one can always reply that the technical solvability of this scenario is also logically possible. Skeptical hypothesis, therefore, must always have a convincing explanation as to why, in this case, no technical solvability is possible and why no scientific explanation can help us.

Of course, this way of naturalizing epistemology is only one among many others that could remove the skeptical doubts, and not sufficient one.

3. Indeed, the skeptical hypothesis about the evil genius is just an assumption about the *exception* from the usual order of things. The skeptic always can say that the philosophical possibility has at least an intuitive and, therefore,

natural status that somehow must be accounted for. Leaving aside the question whether this possibility is really intuitive, we can take it for a moment seriously to see how radical interpretation could handle it. Let us suppose that there really is a non-indifferent, that is *evil*, Deceiver, sufficiently powerful and omniscient to create a total illusion for us. However, if the Deceiver lies to us, she necessarily participates in communication. It follows that she is restricted by at least two epistemological requirements.

The first minimal epistemological requirement is the requirement of partial ignorance. Intending to deceive me, the Deceiver tries also to *learn* whether I can reveal her lie and what exactly I can know about it. There is always some minimal knowledge about my epistemological situation that eludes any deceiver (though not in the sense of absolutely ineffable subjectivity). Indeed, does it make sense to deceive someone about whom everything is known? I mean not only all of my beliefs, intentions, goals etc., in other words, all available information about me, but also all my possible reactions in all possible situations. Does it make sense to deceive an absolutely obedient, predictable and controllable mechanism? Perhaps, one would never need to lie if one had absolute control and relevant knowledge of the reactions of other.

On the other hand, I also don't know everything that others know about me. Others have some minimal knowledge about me that to a certain degree eludes my perspective. And, of course, I wouldn't mind gain access to this knowledge. Obviously, these two kinds of minimal knowledge – from my perspective and from the perspective of others – are not the same. Moreover, they are not part of that common basis (innate, as Descartes believed, or socially acquired) that allows people to deceive each other. Daniel Dennett indicates that information about our environment is unevenly distributed among people; it can not be publicly available to the same extent and always for everybody (Dennett, 1996: 126 – 129). This is the reason why we start our communication that is both trade and diplomacy: knowledge in exchange for knowledge, when we hide and reveal something at the same time. With this in mind, we can present the simple epistemological structure of conversation as follows:

1. You know something (about me, for example) that I don't know.
2. I know that you know something that I don't know.
3. You know that I know about your knowing something about me.
4. I know that you know that I know about this. (Or: I know about your (second-order) knowing about my (second-order) knowing).

It is tempting to add 'etc.' here, as if the intentions of the participants of the conversation could infinitely superimpose one above the other. But that

would be wrong, because all other changes in intentions can take place only within the framework of these four steps. Actually, we don't need any more levels of intention to join the conversation. Moreover, for lying or bluffing we can confine ourselves only to the first three steps:

1. You are going to deceive me.
2. I know that you are going to deceive me.
3. You know that I know that you are going to deceive me.

If we add the fourth condition (I know that you know that I'm aware of your intention to deceive me), the deception, or intention to deceive, and knowledge about it, will become obvious for both participants. That one who is going to deceive me already doesn't hide her intention. However, it's still unclear about what exactly and to what extent. Conversation, therefore, can be continued. Indeed, in the case of [4] we are equal to each other, even if the amounts of our information are not the same. At this stage, we don't know in what and how they coincide. This could make us start a conversation in order to clarify the scope, sources and boundaries of our knowledge, including our intentions. And, of course, this is the main topic of our communication in which we can use the lie.

In a sense, Descartes anticipated this minimal requirement if, of course, we construe his statement that the Deceiver herself couldn't create the idea of God in the sense that she is not omniscient enough and something always eludes her.

4. The second minimal epistemological requirement the Deceiver has to obey was also noted by Descartes. This time it is the assumption of some kind of common knowledge. In other words, lies can take place only against the background of mostly true and shared beliefs. And the more true information in our words, the less noticeable the lie is. (And if the rule "the more monstrous lie is, the more likely people will believe it" is true, it is exactly due to this fact). However, this common background is not an awareness of conventions or rules of communication that sets the parameters for all conversational contexts. This is the way the epistemological contextualism seems tries to dissolve the skeptical problems. Our knowledge of conventions, our awareness that others are also aware of them, mutual expectations that everybody will follow them, and common knowledge about these mutual expectations, are like playing a game. But if the skeptic confuses different conversational contexts with different epistemic standards, breaking all communicative rules, it will turn out that her Deceiver can not even lie. Michael Williams correctly argues

that this answer is too easy: nothing prevents the skeptic from pretending to her own special context (Williams, 1996: 12).

Indeed, some philosophers, as Davidson notes, claim that "there is a convention that in making an assertion a speaker is 'understood' to be speaking with 'the intention of uttering a true sentence'" (Davidson, 1984a: 270). If a conversation or any linguistic activity is meaningful, it should be like a game with a predetermined gain – the mutual understanding, at least. However, usually in communication "[w]hat is understood is that the speaker, if he has asserted something, has represented himself as believing it – as uttering a sentence he believes true, then. But this is not a convention, it is merely part of the analysis of what assertion is. To assert is, among other things, to represent oneself as believing what one asserts. It is clear that there cannot be a conventional sign that shows that one is saying what one believes; otherwise, every liar would use this sign. Convention cannot connect what may always be secret – the intention to say what is true – with what must be public – making an assertion. There is no convention of sincerity" (Ibid.)[2]. In other words, there are no conventions, as Davidson pointed out, that would allow us to derive literal meanings of what has been said from our knowledge (no matter how comprehensive it could be) about non-linguistic purposes of a speaker. On the contrary, usually it is our knowledge about non-linguistic intentions of a speaker that we derive from the literal meanings of her words, but not conversely:

> "no amount of knowledge of what I intend my audience to believe or do will necessarily yield the literal meaning of my utterance. … For if I intend to get my audience to do or believe something, it must be through their correct interpretation of the literal meaning of my words".

It is not surprising that right before this passage Davidson points to the lying: "liar has an ulterior purpose that is served only if his words are understood as having the meaning he intends" (Ibid.: 273). Moreover, in a game we should know not only rules and outcome, but we should also represent ourselves as trying to achieve this purpose. However, provided there are no guarantees for both the speaker and her interpreter that they will identify each other's purposes or intentions correctly, our communication cannot be like winning at a game. The upshot is that there is no reliable guidance to the truth and sincerity in someone's words:

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[2] More on the 'principle of sincerity' see (Searle, 1969: 63) and (Lewis, 1983: 108 – 118).

"[T]he criteria for deciding what an utterance literally means, given by a theory of truth or meaning for the speaker, do not decide whether he has accomplished his ulterior purpose, nor is there any general rule that speakers represent themselves as having any further end than that of using words with a certain meaning and force. The ulterior purpose may or may not be evident, and it may or may not help an interpreter determine the literal meaning. I conclude that it is not an accidental feature of language that the ulterior purpose of an utterance and its literal meaning are independent, in the sense that the latter cannot be derived from the former: it is of the essence of language. I call this feature of language the principle of *the autonomy of meaning*" (Ibid.: 274).

On the other hand, it is unnecessary for successful communication that a speaker and her interpreter mean the same things by the same words (Ibid.: 277). Moreover, there is no need for coincidence even on the level of literal meaning[3]. It is sufficient that their methods (or 'theories', as Davidson called them) of mutual interpretation sometimes will coincide. This relatively regular (though always partial) coincidence of their 'theories' can be achieved not by any set of conventions, but by providing to the interpreter 'clues' for 'what', 'where' and 'how' has been uttered: "Since the literal meaning operates as well when the use is absent as when it is present, no convention that operates only in 'standard' situations can give the literal meaning" (Ibid.: 275). Of course, there must be some mutual expectations (and even agreements) about their previous understanding of the words. "But such general knowledge", according to Davidson, "is hard to reduce to rules, much less conventions or practices", because "there is no saying what someone must know who knows the language; for intuition, luck, and skill must play as essential a role here as in devising a new theory in any field; and taste and sympathy a larger role" (Ibid.: 278 – 279). In other words, tying to understand someone we always have to use radical interpretation of the words and behavior of a speaker. This means that every time in conversation we are forced to apply to a speaker's words our ever flexible and changeable pattern of inference *as if* it is hers (Ibid.: 279).

5. Now, if the radical interpretation presupposes both mutual expectations in the awareness of the meanings of words and incompleteness of interpersonal knowledge, I can conclude that no one can ever be sure that she completely revealed a deception. At the same time, this means that the Deceiver also can never be sure that she has succeeded in her trick. If so, then the skeptical

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[3] More on this see (Davidson, 2005a: 89 – 108), where Davidson reformulates the difference between the literal and the implied meanings using the notion of the 'first meaning'.

problem can be solved due to the very fact that there are no final 'solutions' for conversational situations. This conclusion concerns both the Deceiver and her supposed victim (see, for example, (Nagel, 1999: 197)).

When there are no guarantees of common knowledge about the rules of communication, the only thing we can rely on is the trust. It turns out now that to deceive someone you have to trust her on many other things and also have to believe that she, at the very least, understands your words. This is possible, however, only if most of your beliefs coincide and most of them are true. This presumption of truthfulness of our beliefs is not, as Davidson argues, a matter of conscious decision, but a necessary condition for communication. We are literally forced to resort to it in order to understand anything at all.

Of course, this presumption does not guarantee that *all* of our beliefs are veridical, but only that most of them are, providing thereby a general background for lies and mistakes. At the same time, the presumption saves us, as Davidson states, "from a standard form of skepticism by showing why it is impossible for all our beliefs to be false together" (Davidson, 2001a: 153). Davidson points out that if a speaker wants to be understood she shouldn't systematically deceive us about whether she really believes in what she says. On the other hand, if you admit that most of her utterances are meaningful, though she is totally mistaken about most of the facts of the world, it means only that your translation of her words is not successful. You can not understand a speaker while she is absolutely mistaken about the common world[4]. We understand a speaker only if we ascribe to her beliefs that would be in accordance with events and objects of the outer world. At the same time, these events and objects must be the causes of our own beliefs. Moreover, if communication is at all possible, it is only because the causes of our beliefs coincide in most cases. The very fact of successful communication is evidence of such a coincidence. On this ground Davidson concludes that "[w]hat stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. And what we, as interpreters, must take

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[4] Cf. "Of course, in any particular case, [speaker] may be wrong in what she believes about the world; what is impossible is that she should be wrong most of the time. The reason is apparent: unless there is a presumption that the speaker knows what she means, i.e. is getting her own language right, there would be nothing for an interpreter to interpret. To put the matter another way, nothing could count as someone regularly misapplying her own words". (Davidson, 2001c: 37 – 38).

them to be is what they in fact are" (Ibid.: 151)[5]. Besides, this approach allows us to ask about the reason for the Deceiver to lie to me. In other words, it allows us to ask about her intentions, when she is forced to enter communication to deceive me. In any case, now everything will occur not in the framework of the skeptical scenario.

However, the most important fact here is that our perception of the outer world can not be like Humpty Dumpty's phrase he said to Alice: "There's glory for you", when he meant "There's a nice knockdown argument for you" (Davidson, 2005a: 97). In other words, it can not be like a phrase that could mean anything except the 'literal' (evident) content of the words – in the sense "without their help at all". Therefore, our perception of the world cannot present us with beliefs that would have no 'literal' (objective) content at all. Indeed, disagreements, errors and miscommunications are always possible, but not to such an extent that the radical interpretation would be unable to cope with them. We can say, therefore, that the main idea of both epistemological requirements is that, as Rorty rightly observed, radical interpretation starts from *ourselves*, that is, as the interpretation of our own beliefs and perception of the outer world as a kind of speech (Rorty, 1991: 134).

Of course, this is all too familiar line of argument. Why then there is so much criticism of it (if it is not because of its insufficient or sometimes unclear articulation)?

6. Indeed, whether this hermeneutic optimism is justified in regard to our knowledge? Is it not possible that a speaker and her interpreter understand each other on the basis of common but, nonetheless, erroneous beliefs? Davidson himself points out this possibility (Davidson, 2001a: 140). Indeed, the skeptic could broaden the first minimal requirement (about incompleteness of our knowledge) to transform the Cartesian scenario into the Humean, the one of massive error. In particular, Stroud notes that imagining the evil Deceiver in the Cartesian scenario we naturally take into account only those effects that have significance primarily for *us* (Stroud, 2000a: 36). Thus, we don't ask immediately if this requirement is also true for the Deceiver herself. Still

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[5] Many commentators construe Davidson's idea that one has only to ask what a belief is, as it becomes clear that most of our beliefs must be true, as an attempt to push an a priori argument. Usually Davidson did not hide his skepticism about such a definition, although he never denied it. However, he always made it clear in his replies that if this is a priori, it has an empirical character, not transcendental. In particular, he always referred to the ostensive learning of observation sentences during the assimilation of our native language. Indeed, the question about what is a belief is at the same time a question about the ways of acquiring of beliefs and of our ability to evaluate them as true or false.

nothing prevents us from raising this question *later*. Then it will turn out that the Deceiver is in the same boat with us. As an example Stroud takes *Meditations* where Descartes speaks in the first-person singular. Reading it I do not wonder what a strange person Descartes is who doesn't even know is he asleep or not. It is because all of his first-person utterances I could assign to myself as well. Moreover, I know that everyone could say about themselves the same. It follows then that in general no one can know is she asleep now or not (Stroud, 1984: 272). Now we're talking not so much about *my* beliefs, but about all our beliefs which in their totality may not correspond to reality. The possibility of massive error, when even the Deceiver himself, if there is one, would not be exempt from it, therefore, is as much intuitively accessible as the possibility of global deception, when the Deceiver, so to say, stands above the situation.

In order to neutralize this objection, Davidson puts forward his own hypothesis that he contrasts to the massive error hypothesis. Davidson introduces the figure of an omniscient interpreter who, unlike us, never makes mistakes as to the true state of affairs in the world. Interpreting a community of fallible speakers and hearers, she uses the same method they use, but she always does it infallibly and methodologically correct. In other words, in order to understand them, to make their words and behavior comprehensible, she has to interpret their beliefs by relying on her own. It follows, that if she *can* interpret and understand them, most of their beliefs have to match the beliefs of the omniscient interpreter and, correspondingly, are true: "[w]hat an omniscient interpreter knows a fallible interpreter gets right enough if he understands a speaker" (Davidson, 2001a: 153). It is as if the very interpretability of beliefs could provide a guarantee of their truth. On the other hand, if she interprets someone's beliefs as *mostly* erroneous, then it will be just a bad translation and she is not an omniscient interpreter.

Davidson agrees that this argument is likely to be unconvincing for the skeptic, and even may raise doubts as to whether it is correctly formulated. Indeed, if the interpreter is omniscient, then there is no need for interpretation of someone's beliefs because she already knows all of them. But the main objection to Davidson is that his interpreter is *insufficiently* omniscient. For example, Stroud believes that by introducing the figure of the omniscient interpreter Davidson adds nothing to his claim that usually interpretation and ascribing of beliefs are mostly true (Stroud, 2000b: 188 – 189). We just talk now not about most, but about *all* of them. But this is what everyone could say about themselves without pretending to be omniscient. It is simply an

abstract view that is available to all of us, and that we usually call 'objective point of view'. If we could manage to place ourselves so as to see from this point of view, we would be sure that all our beliefs are true. Stroud notes that this is nothing more than a conditional proposition: *if* all of my beliefs are true, *then* the beliefs of all those whom I understand are also in general true. Of course, Davidson is right about conditions of interpersonal interpretation, says Stroud. Nonetheless, the omniscient interpreter, like the evil Deceiver, is in the same boat with those whom she interprets, for all these conditions could be met within the framework of massive error as well. Being an objective and unbiased omniscient interpreter, the skeptic believes, is not sufficiently unbiased. Ernest LePore, Kirk Ludwig, Colin McGinn, Peter Klein, Johnathan Bennett, A. C. Genova, Andrew Ward, Ernest Sosa and even such an opponent of skeptics as Michael Williams also share this opinion (see (LePore, Ludwig, 2007), (Klein, 1986), (McGinn, 1986), (Bennett, 1985), (Genova, 1999), (Ward, 1989), (Sosa, 2003), (Williams, 1996: 134)). Williams, for example, says that even if the omniscient interpreter knows about all causes of our beliefs, this still doesn't guarantee that the knowledge from the outside of any totality of beliefs would coincide with the way we see ourselves and our beliefs from within. In other words, the coherence and correctness of interpretation still doesn't guarantee us an immediate access to the causal link between our beliefs and the world. We cannot simply postulate this coincidence, trying to avoid the problem of the justification of our beliefs, because the skeptic can always reformulate her hypothesis as the problem of inscrutability of reference (Williams, 1996: 306). Indeed, it seems that coherence of beliefs could guarantee us the success of interpretation and that most of our beliefs are true. The skeptic, however, isn't interested in that kind of truthfulness. Williams rightly notes that for Davidson there seems to be only *plain* skeptical possibilities, but not philosophical (Ibid.: 316)[6].

7. It seems, however, that those who criticize Davidson for his alleged insensitivity to the skeptical problems don't fully estimate the merits of the recourse to the idea of the omniscient interpreter. Of course, this idea implies no more than a conditional proposition, but this proposition has, nonetheless, a somewhat different meaning: *if* there is an omniscient interpreter, who would be sufficiently unbiased and wouldn't be in the same boat with us (but would be in an epistemic situation better than ours), *then* she couldn't come to the conclusions about the causal link between our beliefs and their objects other

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[6] On plain possibilities in this context see (Clarke, 1972).

than ours. In other words, if this (also intuitive) possibility would be realized, the omniscient interpreter would have known about this causal link *more*, but nothing *different* from what we usually know.

In a sense, the omniscient interpreter embodies here the condition of the interpretability itself. If someone's speech is interpretable at all, it is interpretable as mostly true, and it is "mostly true" that makes any interpretation possible. For "mostly false" would make any interpretation not so much false as impossible. Not only understanding, but also misunderstanding presupposes the comparison of our and others' beliefs in such a manner that most of them should coincide[7]. Only against this common background we can notice someone's misunderstanding, mistakes and even madness. Indeed, in what sense don't we understand animals or creatures whose intelligence is fundamentally different from ours? In the latter case, probably we just were not interested in each other. Likewise we are usually not interested in the opinion of pets on certain issues. In other words, this "mostly-mismatch" between us and the omniscient interpreter would indicate that it's just not *our* omniscient interpreter, since she is arranged differently and perceives the world in a fundamentally different way. That is why it would be difficult to name the radical mismatch of beliefs a misunderstanding.

Here we come back to the question of an Indifferent Deceiver and to the nature of our perception of the world. Indeed, if (1) we assume that there can be mass delusion as a kind of natural and indifferent misconception, then, as has been said, it would be not so much a delusion as it would be our way of understanding the world. If (2) it is a deliberate mass deception, we return back to the dialectic of communication and its two epistemological requirements. Finally, there is yet another possibility for mass delusion: (3) as a result of some disastrous accident or epistemic illness. However, (2) and (3) already suggest that sooner or later we somehow could learn about this delusion – because it is not a priori impossible. Otherwise they would not differ from (1), for they would lack the dramatic aspect that inspires the skeptic so much. Indeed, the omniscient interpreter is simply one of the names for the possibility an objective view of our epistemological position. Thompson Clark, for

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[7] "Mostly", of course, means here the issue of degree. However, speaking of objectivity, we usually have in mind exactly the extent of our proximity to the true state of affairs. The problem in this case is not about "all or nothing", but about "more or less". As Bruce Vermazen rightly notes, Davidson says rather about a degree of quality than of quantity, because radical interpretation allows us not so much to maximize, as to *optimize* the consensus between beliefs. In other words, it is not about a simple majority of shared beliefs, but about the mostly fundamental beliefs. (Vermazen, 1983: 71n).

example, believed that this possibility was necessary for any meaningful conversation about knowledge (Clarke, 1972: 766 – 767). Davidson just stated this possibility not so categorically, but only as a hypothesis or thought experiment. In any case, this will be our view, or, in other words, such a point of view, which we always (at least in principle) can take or imagine. The fact that the omniscient interpreter embodies the very possibility of interpretability could also be presented as follows: it is as if the world had *its* own opinion (or a point of view) on what happens in it, and accordingly there wouldn't be anyone who'd be better informed about the state of affairs.

However, if we may assume and imagine as meaningful the possibility of the omniscient interpreter, why don't we admit also the possibility of the Omniscient and Omnipotent Deceiver? To put it another way: could the omniscient interpreter have (in addition to her omniscience) the intention to deceive us? If her omniscience doesn't preclude the possibility to interpret us, then why not to assume (contrary to what was said earlier) that her omniscience also doesn't preclude the possibility to deceive us? We can temporarily ignore the fact that she has no reason to do this as she is omniscient and thus controls everything. Suppose that the first epistemological requirement of communication does not restrict her anymore, and she really becomes the Omniscient and Omnipotent Deceiver.

In fact, if by virtue of the Deceiver's omniscience, we identify her with the world itself, then we return to the point at which we began, to the Indifferent Deceiver. Or, if we ignore the optional personification of the Deceiver (which in the case of the omniscient interpreter is, perhaps, the reason why it is so difficult for some to grasp the essence of the Davidson's argument), then we are dealing with Nature again. Moreover, this line of reasoning has long been known in philosophy. In this case we are dealing with only one of its variations: if there is no one who would be more omniscient and omnipotent in the world than the world itself (as the initial condition for objective interpretation), then, creating for us the total illusion of reality, the world actually creates for us not the illusion, but the *reality* itself. Indeed, if all our reality is completely taken out of the mind of the Deceiver (who, in this case, occupies an absolutely objective position), it will not be the mind of Deceiver, but of Creator. And it is the mind of this Creator will be reality for us, because now our beliefs will relate not just to the world, but to the world-deceiver, who, along with the illusion, also created us. Moreover, if the world-deceiver creates for us an intermediaries (feelings, sensations, sensory stimuli and so on), it is not as an obstacle, but as a way of letting us know the world ('illusion' of which it has

created for us). In other words, these intermediaries are the way in which one part of the world (we) learns something about, or has access to, other of its parts[8]. Eventually, it is due to the fact that we are part of this world (i.e., of the omniscient interpreter) that we have access to an objective point of view and the idea of such a point of view at all. In other words, we are talking about causal rather than epistemological intermediaries, for they are part of the direct causal link between our beliefs and the world. They are not, as suggested by the skeptic, both the autonomous causes of our beliefs and their epistemological foundation. Of course, all this is more like the Nature-God of Spinoza or Hegelian Spirit that knows itself, than the medieval or Cartesian God. There's just one caveat: the fact that the world looks at itself through the eyes of one of its parts shouldn't be understood here in the spirit of idealism.

Nonetheless, all this may seem unconvincing – to identify the omniscient interpreter (and Deceiver) with the world. Indeed, why not to imagine that the Omniscient Deceiver, if possible, still does not coincide with the world and is not identical with it? Even if she is a part of the world, there is nothing unusual in the fact that something which is only a part of the world tries to deceive me about the whole world. But even if there is such a part of the world, which has the intention to deceive me and which is not restricted by the first epistemological requirement, it, nevertheless, remains restricted by the second requirement[9]. The overall situation here isn't different from the one in which

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[8] In the same spirit says Nagel: "… Davidson insists on certain consequences of the fact that thought and objective experience, the entire domain of appearances, must be regarded as elements of objective reality, and cannot be conceived apart from it. The subjective is in itself objective, and its connections with the objective world as a whole are such that the radical disjunction between appearance and reality that skepticism requires is not a genuine logical possibility. The argument is that our thoughts depend for their content on their relations to things outside us, including other thinkers and speakers. And since we can't doubt that we are thinking, we can't doubt that the world contains our thoughts and that it is of such a character as to be capable of containing those thoughts. Specifically, to have the content which they have, and which we cannot doubt that they have, our thoughts must be largely true of what they are about. … Though the argument from thought to the objective world is a little longer, and the conclusion is much more comprehensive, the spirit is Cartesian: Not *je pense, donc je suis* but *je pense, donc je sais*. It is Cartesian in the sense of the *cogito* itself, because it depends on the impossibility of doubting that one is thinking the thoughts one thinks one is thinking". (Nagel, 1999: 195 – 196).

[9] At the same time, there is another reason of why it doesn't make sense to assume that the Omniscient Deceiver is unrestricted in her omniscience. As David Lewis showed, if we imagine a god who is omniscient about the world with which he is nevertheless not bound by any restrictions (i.e. he doesn't ascribe himself attitudes *de se*), then, assuming that there are

an adult is trying to deceive a child[10]. Again, it will not be a total deception. Skeptic, therefore, to dramatize this situation in her peculiar manner, would have to suppose that we are *eternally* children in relation to the Deceiver. In other words, that we are always not fully informed about the world[11]. Nonetheless, even in this case our epistemological problem will be mostly scientific, not metaphysical.

8. And again all this may sound only like an allegation. And so it is, but only if we do not take into account that Davidson's answer to the skeptic directly relates to the nature of the causal link between our beliefs and their objects.

Rorty notes in his comments on the criticism from Williams that Davidson indeed offers a direct answer to the skeptic, but not in the sense of coherentism (Rorty, 1998: 158)[12]. In fact, most of Davidson's critics usually consider his argumentation exactly from this perspective. Rorty, however, believed that Davidson offered an answer that in many ways closer to the Williams' theoretical diagnosis of the skeptical position. Davidson discloses an implicit assumption in the skeptic's argumentation – idea that we can know what the belief as such is, without having, at the same time, a set of true beliefs about the causal link between beliefs and their objects. Concerning this causal link Davidson could only repeat what he had already said in his criticism of the scheme-content dualism: do not rush to introduce the notorious gap between the subject and the world, and do not rush to use for bridging this gap the epistemological intermediaries which are provided by philosophical tradition (sense data, experiences etc.) (Davidson, 1984b). It is worth noting here that this advice can be used both against the scenario of intentional Deceiver and against that of massive error.

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many other worlds, he will not know exactly which of the worlds he is omniscient. (Lewis, 1983a: 140 – 141).

[10] Ward makes a similar remark: (Ward, 1989: 138 – 140).

[11] Our epistemological insufficiency is a keynote for Nagel, including in his article on Davidson. Genova argues in a similar way when he proposes to replace the omniscient interpreter with just sufficiently informed interpreter. However, it is very similar to the situation of a conversation between an adult and a child. Genova stops at this, not disclosing the potential of Davidson's argument fully. (Genova, 1999: 178 – 182).

[12] Genova rightly notes that Davidson does not infer the truth of our beliefs from their coherence. Coherence is only a test for the truth of our beliefs, or, in other words, indirect evidence for it, but not a decisive argument. (Genova, 1999: 170 – 171). Moreover, it seems that it is the coherentist reading of Davidson's argument leads some critics to call it *a priori* argument in order to put forward then two main objections to it – argument either contains a vicious circle or it is simply insufficient to rebut the skeptic. (Ibid.: 173 – 174).

To illustrate, we can recourse to the Brain-in-a-Vat scenario. Davidson doesn't see any problem here. Indeed, to what exactly the words of the Brain-in-a-Vat would refer? Davidson's answer in a sense is simpler than that of Putnam (Putnam, 1981), because for Davidson this skeptical scenario is ordinary and not self-contradictory. The best translation of the words of a brain which was isolated throughout its life would be a reference to that artificial environment (vat, computer, sensors etc.) in which it was placed. This would be analogous to the translation of the words of an aborigine by pointing out at the events and objects that are the causes of her beliefs. To believe that the Brain-in-a-Vat's point of view and its coherent totality of beliefs could not coincide with its real epistemological situation is to support the idea that "we can know the content of our intentional states without knowing what causes them" (Rorty, 1998: 160). For the Brain-in-a-Vat it is the vat with nutrient solution, connected to it computer etc. that are the causes of the contents of its beliefs.

However, in what sense they are the causes? It appears that there are at least two ways to construe this question and to answer it. First, if the Brain-in-a-Vat has never known the real world, has always been in the vat (that is, was placed there initially, and so its world depends on a specially built environment), then its world would be artificial only for us, as observers of the brain from the outside, but not for the brain itself. In its perception of the environment the Brain-in-a-Vat differs from us, those who have created these conditions and who, in this sense, are something like Nature for it. The causal histories of perception in the two cases will be completely different. On the other hand, the brain could be placed in this medium only at some point in the person's life. Thus, we can be sure the brain perceives its now artificial world the way it did before being envatted and the way we do. In this case, however, we return to Descartes' communicative scenario and to its resolution[13]. Not to mention that the technical feasibility of such isolation would mean that the scenario is rather plain and solvable, but not philosophical.

Eventually, Williams himself concedes that Davidson's argumentation is directed rather at the implicit assumption of this thought experiment than at the problem raised in it (Williams, 1996: 315). The essence of this assumption is that the contents of our beliefs would remain the same even if their truth

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[13] Rorty slightly modifies this alternative, combining it with Davidson's story about Swampman. In this case, the Brain-in-a-Vat would be presented not with a fictional, but with a real causal history of another man. However, the copy of someone's very complex causal history, as Rorty points out, can be impeccable and the replacement imperceptible only if the whole world in which this history took place will be recreated. And again, as in the case of the indifferent Deceiver, the alternative would have little to do with deception. (Rorty, 2001: 1 – 6).

values change. Or, in other words, even being false all our beliefs will remain with the same contents. And they will be the same because, as skeptic believes, the epistemological intermediaries remain the same. But how these intermediaries manage to stay the same? Is it due to their *own* contents? Then what will guarantee the invariability of the latter? Obviously, here the skeptic embarks on a slippery slope that leads him to the deadlock that was analyzed in detail by Sellars in his criticism of the notion 'sense-data' (Sellars, 1963: 127 – 196). According to Davidson, such invariability of contents is actually impossible, because, as Williams rightly notes, truth and meaning (contents of our beliefs) are closely related (Williams, 1996: 315). The whole point of the introducing the omniscient interpreter is that she doesn't depend on these untrusted intermediaries. We can conclude, therefore, that the conditional proposition, that was mentioned above, could be interpreted in the sense that *if* we, like the omniscient interpreter, shall not rely on these untrusted intermediaries (or, more precisely, on the *idea* of them) in our attempts to understand how we come to know our world, then most of our problems will soon disappear by themselves. From this follows that Stroud's remark, that we may liken ourselves to an omniscient interpreter, could be understood in the opposite sense.

Indeed, the skeptic argues as if the complex causal process of forming of our beliefs consisted of two parts: the objects are the causes of our impressions, and impressions, in their turn, are causes of our beliefs (and, in this sense, are intermediaries between objects and beliefs). Then there is nothing stopping us from assuming that one can somehow replace the first part (objects), while leaving the second (impressions) unchanged. However, for Davidson the causal process is a unified whole, and objects are an indispensable and integral part of this process. This is the meaning of the thesis that beliefs are inherently true. Moreover, the perception in general is only a part of the causal process that forms the content of our beliefs. Initially, we are faced with the causes of our beliefs in the language learning situations, and as such causes there appear exactly objects, not impressions. Impressions (or related concepts) are introduced only later and more like theoretical, or conditional, abstraction that is designed to explain various aspects of the complex causal process. However, even performing the function of explanation (e.g., errors or distortions in perception), they are not the only ones in this way. That's why we always can do without them. And so Davidson usually did[14].

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[14] Davidson once admitted that he tries to avoid the use of the concept of perception, adding that normally, when he talked about the causes of our most fundamental beliefs, he talked about exactly what is often called perception. (Davidson, 1991: 128 – 129).

Actually, Stroud and some other critics of Davidson argue in such a manner as if to be sufficiently unbiased for an omniscient interpreter meant not only to be free from epistemological intermediaries, but also be able to look at us and *our* intermediaries from outside and, accordingly, find out whether they deceive us. But how is it possible? The skeptic, of course, agrees that it is impossible, because all of us are *doomed* to these intermediaries. For Davidson it is nonsense. Even being a part of the causal chain between beliefs and the world, sense-data, experiences or sensory stimuli are not intermediaries in the strict sense, because they have no epistemological *content* (Davidson, 2001a: 141 – 144). In other words, they don't carry any propositional content: being mute they report nothing, no information. Hence, they can be neither reliable nor unreliable grounds for our beliefs.

If, on the other hand, it's all about language as a medium through which we see the world, then we are dealing with no more than a misleading metaphor: "[w]e should banish the idea that language is epistemically something like sense-data, something that embodies what we can take in, but is itself only a token, or representative, of what is out there. Language does not mirror or represent reality, any more than our senses present us with no more than appearances. Presentations and representations as mere proxies or pictures will always leave us one step short of what knowledge seeks; skepticism about the power of language to capture what is real is old-fashioned skepticism of the senses given a linguistic twist. We do not see the world through language any more than we see the world through our eyes. We don't look *through* our eyes, but *with* them" (Davidson, 2005b: 130). Therefore, if our perception doesn't need any intermediaries, then our language is just one of its modes: "[l]anguage is the organ of propositional perception" (Ibid.: 135).

Thus, Davidson gives to the Brain-in-a-Vat scenario the following answer: "If anything is systematically causing certain experiences (or verbal responses), that is what the thoughts and utterances are about. This rules out systematic error. If nothing is systematically causing the experiences, there is no content to be mistaken about" (Davidson, 2001b: 201). In other words, if, on the one hand, there is a Brain-in-a-Vat that doesn't know that it had been envatted (and, therefore, doesn't know the real causes of its beliefs), but only suspects this, and if, on the other, there is also a Brain-in-a-Vat that really knows about this, then, of course, we can not say that these stories are in general the same. Indeed, the second one is much closer to us, because the isolation in question is the most usual and quite amenable to study: for example, if this means the isolation in a skull. The skeptic, of course, will insist that she meant something

other. Then, however, she will have to reformulate the basic principles of this isolation, and again, possibly not without the help of the epistemological intermediaries. For this she will have to write a new story to justify her use of these intermediaries. And there is more to this: she has to compose her new story from the stuff of the ordinary life that is part of the natural processes, or amenable to radical interpretation.

9. Given all the above, we could suppose why Davidson answered to the Cartesian (Deceiver) and Humean (massive error) varieties of a skeptical scenario with his extended version of externalism – perceptual and social at the same time (Ibid.: 200 – 201). The perceptual externalism is an answer to the Cartesian scenario, while the social externalism is an answer to that transformation of the Cartesian scenario into Humean. Thus, Davidson argues, that "*if* you accept perceptual externalism, there *is* an easy argument against global skepticism of the senses of the sort that Descartes, Hume, Russel, and endless others have thought requires an answer". And then he adds: "I would introduce the social factor in a way that connects it directly with perceptual externalism, thus locating the role of society within the causal nexus that includes the interplay between persons and the rest of the nature" (Ibid.)[15].

In the end, we again return to the Indifferent Deceiver, or rather to a redesigned and extended version of it. We need only to construe the lies of the Indifferent Deceiver and quinean naturalization of epistemology as widely as possible, taking into account what is happening not only in nature, but also in human society. Indeed, an omniscient interpreter is, like Descartes' Deceiver, in the same boat with us, but not in the sense in which Stroud meant this. They are in the same boat with us in completely usual sense, that is, in the sense in which social sciences also treat lies, manipulation and error as the object of their study.

To put it simply, the main thesis of the article is that any skeptical scenario in epistemology is faced with the following dilemma. If in the scenario we are dealing with an Indifferent Deceiver, then there is no deception at all, or there may be only a local misconception. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with the communicative situation, then we may respond that the situation is always solvable, or suggests the possibility of only local deception. In general, naturalistic attitude to the metaphysical intuitions, embodied in various skeptical scenarios, can be expressed in the question "What is it made?". And every

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[15] Anita Avramides generally makes a good point that the social factor (communication with others) takes in the Davidson's argument about the same place as the all-good God in Descartes' when he tries to solve his skeptical problem. (Avramides, 2003: 143).

answer to the question must be tested against this dilemma. At the same time such an attitude would require, of course, a kind of natural history of these intuitions.

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Цель данной статьи заключается в том, чтобы показать, как и почему метод радикальной интерпретации, предложенный Д. Дэвидсоном, справляется с теми проблемами, которые сформулированы в различных скептических сценариях. В частности, метод радикальной интерпретации лишает картезианский скептический сценарий (в традиционной и современной версии) его убедительности и статуса философской проблемы как таковой. Используя различие между намеренным и ненамеренным обманом, можно показать, что сценарий глобального скептицизма получает свое разрешение в обоих случаях. В статье также рассмотрена возможность расширения того варианта натурализованной эпистемологии, который предложил У.В.О. Куайн, – прежде всего, за счет введения социального фактора. В частности, речь идет о необходимых ограничениях, налагаемых коммуникацией на наши гипотезы о знании и заблуждении. Помимо этого, в статье обосновывается необходимость применения умеренного экстернализма (как перцептивного, так и социального) к декартовскому и юмовскому вариантам скептического сценария.

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