

DAVIDSON'S THEORY OF MEANING AND
THE EXPLANATION OF SEMANTIC PHENOMENA

Wan-Chuan Fang

Abstract

As a theory modeled on Tarski's theory of truth, Davidson's theory of meaning is aptly classified as a theory of reference. A question then naturally arises: How can such a theory of reference qualify as a theory of meaning? Hilary Putnam even claims that, in principle, it cannot succeed as a theory of meaning. This paper attempts to answer the question and to take exception to Putnam's claim.

The first part introduces Davidson's theory of meaning in some detail. I then try to clarify the connections between Davidson's theory and the explanation of semantic phenomena or the explication of semantic notions. In light of the connections, there is no doubt that Davidson's theory indeed qualifies as a theory of meaning. Finally, Putnam's claim is shown to be unfounded. Furthermore, in addition to the fact that his own view on word meaning is closely related and complementary to Davidson's theory in at least three ways, the former is found to presuppose the latter.