1. Introduction

The idea that there are conceptual schemes, relative to which we conceptualize experience, and empirical content, the non-conceptual (and so purely causal) "raw" data of experience that get conceptualized through our conceptual schemes into beliefs or sentences, is not new. The scheme-content dualist par excellence was Kant, and in the twentieth century the logical positivists formulated the dualism in terms of linguistic frameworks (or "languages") and sense-data. Quine himself, though rejecting the positivists' characterization of linguistic frameworks as sets of analytic sentences, nonetheless continued to distinguish what he calls 'language', embodying our set of concepts, from 'extralinguistic facts', the raw data of experience. On this view a conceptual scheme would be the total system of concepts and, so, the epistemic agent's total contribution to the truth of beliefs and sentences; understood linguistically, a conceptual scheme would be the total linguistic contribution to doxastic and sentential truth. Empirical content would then be the total nonconceptual content given by the world itself and, so, the world's total contribution to doxastic and sentential truth—the total extralinguistic contribution to such truth. Nonetheless Quine argued that, though "[i]t is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact" (1951, 36), this "double dependence ... is not significantly traceable into the statements ... taken one by one" (42, my emphasis throughout). Instead, according to Quine, "language" or "scheme" is dispersed holistically throughout all the sentences of a theory.
The idea that talk of 'conceptual schemes' makes sense only if there is something fixed, some 'empirical content', that different schemes conceptualize differently and, likewise, that talk of 'empirical content' makes sense only if there are conceptual schemes to conceptualize it is not new either. Davidson is right that traditionally "[c]ontent and scheme ... come as a pair" (1988, 46). The idea that there are neither conceptual schemes nor empirical content, however, is new. Detractors of the dualism argue that our beliefs and sentences are not true or false relative to the way in which we conceptualize the raw data of experience but are true or false of the world directly. Instead of scheme-content dualism, therefore, there is epistemic and semantic direct realism, where the subject of beliefs and sentences, at least when true, is the world itself.

Now the idea that there are neither conceptual schemes nor empirical content is so new that only four arguments have so far been given against the dualism. Further, on my read, Davidson himself presents versions of all four. In this paper, I evaluate these four arguments generally and Davidson’s versions of each specifically. Along the way, I show that in both the general and specific case the first three arguments rely on the fourth. In particular, the first argument against scheme-content dualism, that it is a dualism and dualisms are inherently untenable, gives way to the second, that what is untenable about the dualism is its reliance on empirical content. The second argument purports to demonstrate the problematic nature of empirical content by investigating how such content is meant to function with conceptual schemes. It then turns out that the third argument is itself a dual of the second; it purports to demonstrate the problematic nature of conceptual schemes by investigating how such schemes are meant to function with their content. But the third argument, I show, follows from the fourth. That fourth and final argument aims to disqualify the possibility of Kuhnian incommensurability, where what would be incommensurable would be claims made from different conceptual schemes. All the arguments against scheme-content dualism given so far therefore rest on doubts about the incommensurability thesis. From many arguments there is in this sense just one.

Finally, I show that the fate of the first three arguments against scheme-content dualism hangs on that of the fourth. Then I present four reasons why the fourth argument fails. This bodes poorly for Davidson specifically and opponents of scheme-content dualism generally.

2. First Argument

The first general argument against scheme-content dualism is that it is a dualism, and dualisms are inherently untenable.
Past writers such as Dewey and Hegel, and present ones such as Rorty and McDowell, suspicious of dualisms generally, might reject scheme-content dualism for this reason. Nonetheless the claim that dualisms are inherently untenable is itself untenable. If current physics is correct, then wave-particle dualism, rather than being untenable, is in fact explanatory of how quantum phenomena behave. Now one might argue that particle-wave dualism is not really explanatory because it is a dualism. Still tenable dualisms are not hard to find, everything from positive charge-negative charge to politically liberal-politically conservative. Perhaps the point then is to avoid metaphysical dualisms. But scheme-content dualism is not, at least not in the first instance, a metaphysical dualism; it is a dualism about contributions to the truth of beliefs and sentences and, so, is epistemic and semantic. Moreover, it is unclear that epistemic or semantic dualisms are themselves necessarily problematic: consider factual-normative, cognitive-conative, or foundational-inferential, on the one hand, and declarative-interrogative, indicative-subjunctive, or active-passive, on the other. Nonetheless certain epistemic and semantic dualisms are allegedly untenable, chief of which, if Quine is right, are analytic-synthetic, contingent-necessary, and a priori-a posteriori. Scheme-content might be related to these and so be untenable for this reason.

Davidson (1974a) applies just this reasoning in his specific version of this first argument against scheme-content dualism. Though much of the argument is left implicit, Davidson’s point seems to be that scheme-content dualism is indeed related to analytic-synthetic dualism, which like Quine he takes to be untenable. The implication is that Davidson therefore takes scheme-content dualism to be untenable as well. Kraut makes Davidson’s argument explicit:

The scheme-content dichotomy is intimately related to the dichotomy between analytic and synthetic truths; sentences guaranteed true by the structure of the scheme are true purely on the basis of meaning, rather than on the basis of empirical fact. But this [analytic-synthetic dualism] is an untenable dualism, and thus any other dualism which embraces it is thereby tainted. (Kraut 1986, 401)

It is not, as we have seen, sufficient to lambaste a dualism merely for being a dualism. So what is untenable about both dualisms? Davidson writes:

The analytic-synthetic distinction is ... explained in terms of something that may serve to buttress conceptual relativism, namely, the idea of empirical content. The dualism of the synthetic and the analytic is a dualism of sentences some of
which are true (or false) both because of what they mean and because of their empirical content, while others are true (or false) by virtue of meaning alone, having no empirical content. If we give up the dualism, we abandon the conception of meaning that goes with it, but we do not have to abandon the idea of empirical content: we can hold, if we want, that all sentences have empirical content.... Meanings gave us a way to talk about categories, the organizing structure of language, and so on, but it is possible, as we have seen, to give up meanings and analyticity while retaining the idea of language as embodying a conceptual scheme....

I want to urge that this second dualism of scheme and content ... cannot be made intelligible and defensible. (1974a, 189, with the exception of 'all')

According to Davidson, analytic-synthetic dualism alleges that there are two distinct contributions to the truth of sentences: their meaning and their empirical content. The truth of a synthetic sentence is due to both; the truth of an analytic sentence, just the former. But, Davidson explains, denying the dualism need not deny the distinction between linguistic and extralinguistic contributions to sentential truth. As we have seen from Quine, those two could contribute holistically. While analytic-synthetic dualism takes every synthetic sentence to have its own empirical content,4 scheme-content dualism can take all sentences to share empirical content. Thus, according to Davidson, both analytic-synthetic and scheme-content dualisms involve empirical content.

Now Davidson in subsequent pages and articles (1982a, 1983, 1988, 1990a) worries about whether the very idea of empirical content, this extralinguistic component, is intelligible. So Davidson’s first argument against scheme-content dualism, that the dualism is untenable because it is connected to another untenable dualism, gives way to the view that the idea of empirical content is what is untenable in both dualisms. Davidson’s point seems to be that it makes as little sense to say that the truth of a sentence is due in part to empirical content figuring individually in that sentence as it does to say that the truth of a sentence is due in part to empirical content figuring holistically in all sentences in one’s language. Thus what I take to be Davidson’s first argument against scheme-content dualism follows from what I take to be his second, that the notion of empirical content is unintelligible.5

There is a lesson here for the first general argument against scheme-content dualism as well. Unless something particular can be found wrong with the dualism, then finding it untenable merely because it is a dualism is unconvincing. Davidson points to something allegedly wrong with the dualism: one of its duals.
So what is wrong with empirical content? Sellars (1956) has long argued against what he calls the "myth of the given," where the form of the myth that Sellars rejects is that sense-data, or sensory givens, exist. Sellars argues that it is an instance of the naturalistic fallacy to maintain that something merely given, rather than already conceptual, can be justificatory, yet sense-data are meant to justify perceptual beliefs. Davidson's own argument against empirical content is inspired by Sellars, though not until Davidson 1999 does Davidson acknowledge his debt.

Most of Davidson's second argument against scheme-content dualism is only implicit in 1974a, where Davidson explicitly targets conceptual schemes. Davidson 1982a, 1983, 1988, and 1990a explicitly target empirical content. There he argues that empirical content, as the data that schemes conceptualize, is itself meant to be nonconceptual and so causal, but it is also meant to justify perceptual beliefs, sometimes thought to be expressible as observation sentences. Now Davidson asks whether anything nonconceptual can justify beliefs. According to him, each time that empirical content itself seems to justify a belief, awareness of this alleged content justifies it. The alleged empirical content is never itself what does the justifying. But, Davidson argues, awareness is a species of belief. That makes it conceptual, the very sort of thing that nonconceptual empirical content cannot be. Rather than empirical content, Davidson concludes that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" (1983, 141) and that "all that counts as evidence or justification for a belief must come from the same totality of belief to which it belongs" (155). He later makes the same point:

Much of modern philosophy has been devoted to trying to arbitrate between the unconceptualized given and what is needed to support belief, but we now see that there is no chance of success. The truth is, nothing can supply a reason for a belief except another (or many other) belief. (1997, 22)

Thus this second argument against scheme-content dualism generally, or Davidson's version specifically, questions how something nonconceptual can be justificatory. Sellars puts the worry in terms of the naturalistic fallacy and Davidson in terms of never being able to get out of our system of beliefs, but the worry might also be put in terms of a category mistake: merely causal and nonconceptual belong to one logical category, conceptual and justificatory, another. So put, this second argument generalizes to the claim that the two alleged duals are logically incompatible. As such, no sense can be made of
how empirical content is supposed to function with a conceptual scheme.

Now on my read Davidson intends what I take to be his third argument against the dualism, the first explicit argument in 1974a, to be that no sense can be made of how a conceptual scheme is supposed to function with empirical content. Thus Davidson's second and third arguments against scheme-content dualism themselves are duals of the same argument. Moreover, the duality of arguing against each dual generalizes beyond merely Davidson. If Sellars in fact shows that there can be no raw data of experience contributing to doxastic and sentential truth, then there would be no work for something that conceptualizes this raw data to do. Yet the raison d'être of conceptual schemes is to conceptualize empirical content; so if there is no such content, then one might argue that there are no such schemes. This becomes clear in the third argument against the dualism.

4. Third Argument

Just as the second argument against scheme-content dualism attacks the very idea of empirical content by asking how such content can function with a conceptual scheme, so the third attacks the very idea of a conceptual scheme by asking how such a scheme can function with empirical content. Now a conceptual scheme is meant to conceptualize empirical content. But just what does this mean? Kant's (1787) Transcendental Analytic describes how a priori concepts of the understanding, the categories, conceptualize sensible intuitions—where such intuitions contain data that have already entered the cognitive process through sensation. Yet Kant is silent on precisely how these intuitions get their empirical content in the first place, and so how the raw data of experience, given by things in themselves to the faculty of sensibility, can ever come to be conceptualized. Needing to explain this is a particular instance of the scheme-content dualist's needing to explain how a conceptual scheme can function with empirical content generally.

Though Kant remains silent, Davidson gives voice to explanations offered by other such dualists. Speaking on their behalf, Davidson (1974a) claims that conceptual schemes are said either to 'organize' ('categorize', 'systematize', 'divide up') or to 'fit' ('predict', 'account for', 'face the tribunal of') their empirical content. Absent any general argument against these metaphors, let me consider Davidson's specific one.

Davidson argues that both sets of metaphors involve contradictions. Consider the former. Davidson contends that a scheme can only "organize" something already containing objects. When one organizes a closet, Davidson explains, one organizes objects in the closet; likewise were one to organize the
Pacific Ocean, one might move its fish or straighten its shore. Thus, for Davidson, the very process of organizing entails that the thing to be organized is subdivided into objects. So if a scheme can organize empirical content, then that content would be subdivided into objects as well. But, Davidson observes, according to scheme-content dualism, a conceptual scheme is what divides empirical content into objects in the first place. Conceptualization is meant to be the means by which it does that. Empirical content, as the totality of extralinguistic fact, enters into beliefs and sentences by means of concepts, fact by fact. Nonetheless empirical content per se, so Davidson claims on behalf of scheme-content dualists, is itself amorphous. Therefore understanding conceptualization as organization presupposes that empirical content is already internally individuated, which \textit{ex hypothesi} only conceptualization itself could effect. So empirical content is and is not conceptualized. The ‘organizing’ metaphor therefore cannot explain what a conceptual scheme does when it conceptualizes empirical content.

Now it is difficult at first to see how this understanding of empirical content relates to what Davidson has said above. There empirical content was causal data, and being merely causal does not entail being undifferentiated or amorphous. Still there are two things to be said on Davidson’s behalf. First, differentiation requires a principle by which parts are separated from other parts, and this principle would seem to involve or to be a concept. So perhaps empirical content per se would be amorphous. Second, as explained below, Davidson does not need this argument to work for his ultimate argument against the dualism to work. So let me move on.

Consider now Davidson’s analysis of the second set of metaphors, involving a conceptual scheme’s ‘fitting’ (or ‘predicting’ or ‘facing the tribunal of’) its empirical content. What can ‘fitting’, in contradistinction from ‘organizing’, mean? Davidson decides: “for a theory to fit or face up to the totality of possible sensory evidence,” a candidate for empirical content, “is for that theory to be true. If a theory quantifies over physical objects, numbers, or sets, what it says about these entities is true provided that they as a whole fit the sensory evidence” (1974a, 193). So a scheme’s fitting its empirical content reduces to its being true of such content. But truth, Davidson claims, finds its home in semantics. Davidson therefore considers how a scheme would fit its content, by considering how evidence of such fitting would manifest linguistically.

Davidson had already urged: “We may identify conceptual schemes with languages, then, or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages” (1974a, 185). Different schemes fitting their empirical content would be
evidenced by complete or partial failure of intertranslatability of true sentences from one language into another, where, according to Davidson, "[t]here would be complete failure if no significant range of [true] sentences in one language could be translated into the other; there would be partial failure if some significant range could be translated and some range could not" (185). Davidson's reasoning seems to be that a language's sentences being true yet intranslatable into another language entails that these sentences are true only relative to their own language. That language must then contribute something distinctly linguistic to the truth of its sentences that the other does not contribute to the truth of its own sentences. In each case, for Davidson, the language's total contribution would be its conceptual scheme. In the remainder of the third argument against scheme-content dualism, Davidson purports to show that complete failure of translation is impossible; in the fourth, he purports to show the same for partial failure.

With this linguistic formulation on board, Davidson asks whether sentences "fit" their empirical content. "It is sentences," he claims on the scheme-content dualist's behalf, "that predict (or are used to predict), sentences that cope or deal with things, that fit our sensory promptings.... It is sentences also that face the tribunal of experience" (1974a, 193). Do sentences predict, cope or deal with, fit, or face the tribunal of experience? First, Davidson contends that this family of 'fitting' metaphors bottoms out in one way or another in asking whether sentences correspond to experience, their empirical content. Then he contends that they do not correspond to it, at least not in any useful sense. Davidson here recalls his earlier (1969) contention that if sentences correspond to anything, then they correspond to the world at large; he later observes:

[T]here is nothing interesting or instructive to which true sentences might correspond.... One can locate individual objects, if the sentence happens to name or describe them, but even such location makes sense relative only to a frame of reference, and so presumably the frame of reference must be included in whatever it is to which true sentences correspond. Following out this line of thought led [C. I.] Lewis to conclude that if true sentences correspond to anything at all, it must be the universe as a whole; thus, all true sentences correspond to the same thing. Frege ... reached the same conclusion through a very similar course of reasoning.... [S]tarting from the assumptions that a true sentence can't be made to correspond to something different by the substitution of coreferring singular terms, or by the substitution of logically equivalent sentences, one can show that if true sentences correspond to anything, they correspond to the same thing. But this is to trivialize the concept of correspondence completely; there is no interest in the relation of correspondence if there is only one thing to correspond to.... (1990b, 303–4)
According to Davidson, since it follows from his holism that all sentences correspond to the very same thing, the world at large, nothing is gained by saying that a certain sentence “fits” or “corresponds” to anything at all; the very same could be said of any sentence. And, for Davidson, the very point of speaking of truth as correspondence is to explain the truth of individual true sentences. So, Davidson concludes, there is no philosophically useful notion of truth as correspondence.

Here as above let me say that Davidson does not need this argument for his ultimate conclusion against scheme-content dualism to stick; holism is optional, as is Davidson's insistence that potentially disparate metaphors all reduce to the idea of correspondence. Nonetheless for the sake of argument and following Davidson's lead, there is, he contends, something salvageable from the notion of fitting, if a sentence's fitting its empirical content is understood as its being true. According to Davidson, saying that a sentence is of its empirical content is no better than saying that it corresponds to it, since Davidson, as quoted above, takes Frege via similar reasoning to show that all true sentences refer to the same thing. But, according to Davidson, saying that a sentence is true simpliciter is better than saying that it is true of its empirical content because unlike correspondence there is a philosophically useful notion of truth, namely, Tarski's. So on Davidson's view talk of a sentence's 'fitting its content' gives way to its being 'true of its content', ultimately giving way to its being 'true'.

Davidson then observes:

Since Convention T embodies our best intuition as to how the concept of truth is used, there does not seem to be much hope for a test that a conceptual scheme is radically different from ours if that test depends on the assumption that we can divorce the notion of truth from that of translation. (1974a, 193)

Davidson seems to argue that the only sense in which a sentence can be true is if it can be translated. According to him, the second metaphor of language as fitting its empirical content reduces to the idea that its sentences are translatable. But the metaphor of ‘fitting’ was supposed to explain the possibility of complete failure of translatability. Since ‘fitting’ is ultimately explained in terms of translatability, ‘fitting’ cannot without contradiction itself explain the possibility of complete failure of translatability. Davidson, having found the ‘organizing’ metaphor contradictory as well, concludes that no sense can be made of how a conceptual scheme and its empirical content are to function dualistically. As in the second argument, so now in the third, Davidson runs into logical worries when trying to explain how scheme and content are meant to interact.
Now even if having given Davidson the benefit of the doubt so far, one might still object that the ‘organizing’ and ‘fitting’ metaphors are only metaphors, and arguing that metaphors fail to explain scheme-content dualism might speak against the metaphors and not the dualism. Rorty says much the same: “There is no general argument against the scheme-content distinction” (1979b, 99, my emphasis). Rorty contends that Davidson’s and others’ arguments against scheme-content dualism, like those against skepticism, are ad hominem, though he would more accurately call them ad formulationem: arguments directed not to the dualist’s person but the dualism’s formulation.

Davidson’s considering these two families of metaphors does seem ad formulationem. Davidson considers only these, offering no guarantee that ‘organizing’ and ‘fitting’ (and their respective relatives) are the only candidates for explaining the relation between a scheme and its content. Now one might agree with Rorty that to expect a guarantee that they are is unrealistic:

To show that every alternative proposed would have the same defect would be to know in advance the range of the skeptic’s [or scheme-content dualist’s] imagination ... to be able to do in philosophy what nobody dreams we can do in science—predict that any new theory to come along will merely be a disguised version of our present theory. (Rorty 1979b, 82)

Or one might expect a different strategy from Davidson altogether. Not only does Davidson provide a different strategy in what I take to be his fourth argument against scheme-content dualism. His second and third arguments both follow from his fourth—though Davidson does not himself realize this. Regardless, it does not matter that Davidson’s critique of the ‘organizing’ and ‘fitting’ metaphors are ad formulationem, for his fourth argument, on which this critiquing depends, is general. And since Davidson’s first argument against the dualism follows from his second, itself a dual of his third, and this third follows from Davidson’s fourth, this fourth argument against scheme-content dualism is on my read Davidson’s only substantive argument against the dualism. Further, the third general argument against scheme-content dualism itself depends upon a generalized version of Davidson’s fourth argument. If so, then whether understood generally or in Davidson’s formulations specifically, the first three arguments against the dualism rely on the fourth. Moreover, as we shall see, should the fourth argument falter, then so would the other three.

5. Fourth Argument

The third general argument against scheme-content dualism contended that no sense can be made of how a conceptual
scheme is to function with empirical content. Davidson’s particular version of the argument canvassed two families of metaphors meant to explain this functioning, from which Davidson concluded that complete intranslatability of one language into another is impossible. But could there be partial intranslatability? Could two schemes, understood as languages, make only partially distinct contributions to the truth of sentences stated in them? This would amount to the two schemes partially overlapping, so that some claims could and some could not be compared.

That some sentences of one language might be true yet intranslatable into true sentences of another is one way of construing Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis, since under such circumstances the meaning of these sentences could not be compared. Instead each sentence would be true merely relative to its own conceptual scheme (or Kuhnian “paradigm”) and inexpressible as a sentence true relative to another. The fourth general argument against scheme-content dualism is that the incommensurability thesis is false, and so there cannot be different schemes making different contributions to sentential truth. Kitcher (1978) and Putnam (1981) join Davidson (1974a) in making this general argument by taking to task alleged examples of incommensurability. Davidson, focusing not merely on Kuhn (1970) but also on Whorf (1956), writes:

Whorf, wanting to demonstrate that Hopi incorporates a metaphysics so alien to ours that Hopi and English cannot, as he puts it, ‘be calibrated’, uses English to convey the contents of sample Hopi sentences.... Kuhn is brilliant at saying what things were like before the revolution using—what else?—our post-revolutionary idiom. (Davidson 1974a, 184)

If Whorf and Kuhn are correct, then language-users would seem able to employ incommensurable conceptual schemes. But Whorf and Kuhn illustrate examples of incommensurability in commensurable terms. So—Kitcher, Putnam, and Davidson charge—Whorf and Kuhn are wrong to say that Hopi, pre-Lavoisierans, or others have conceptual schemes different from ours. Thus the fourth general argument against scheme-content dualism demands an account of incommensurability not presupposing commensurability. Absent such an account—and Davidson, Kitcher, and Putnam give reason to think that such an account is not in the offing—the incommensurability thesis cannot be sustained. But then neither can the possibility of different conceptual schemes, relative to which sentences are true or false, nor empirical content, its necessary dual, meant to stay constant between such schemes, be sustained.

Whether or not this general argument works, one would still like to know just what Whorf and Kuhn are doing when
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describing allegedly incommensurable conceptual schemes. Davidson has a response, which amounts to what I take to be his specific version of the fourth argument against scheme-content dualism. According to Davidson, Whorf and Kuhn are interpreting sentences held true by linguistic aliens. And Davidson has long (since 1967) insisted, interpretation involves constructing from Tarski-style T-sentences extensional meanings and beliefs, a necessary condition on which is the application of the principle of charity—roughly, that an alien’s beliefs generally be true by her interpreter’s own lights, or that an interpreter maximize the number of alien beliefs that the interpreter takes to be true. But then, Davidson argues, “[g]iven the underlying methodology of interpretation, we [interpreters] could not be in a position to judge that others had concepts or beliefs radically different from our own” (1974a, 197). Instead, Davidson insists, no significant range of sentences that an alien holds true can be false by her interpreter’s lights. And, for Davidson, since interpretation involves an interpreter’s constructing meanings and beliefs by translating into the interpreter’s own language sentences that she takes the alien to hold true, the principle of charity requires that no significant range of sentences that an alien holds true can be intranslatable into the interpreter’s language. Add to this Davidson’s model of triangulation, according to which interpreter and interpreted alien can interpret one another, and no significant range of sentences that any two language-users hold true can be intranslatable. Now though an alien’s holding a sentence true does not necessarily entail that the sentence is true in the alien’s language, Davidson had earlier (1973) argued that the former is evidence of the latter. Suppose that Davidson is correct. He seems then to have provided evidence that no significant range of sentences true in any language can be intranslatable. So partial intranslatability becomes impossible; there would be no evidence of scheme-content dualism. But Davidson goes even further. Identifying sentences true in a language with that language (and bracketing any insignificant range of sentences true yet intranslatable), Davidson concludes that all languages are necessarily translatable.

I save for the next section just where Davidson’s argument goes wrong. Let me here instead investigate how Davidson’s third and fourth arguments relate. The third argument is concerned only with translation, the fourth with interpretation, and though similar, for Davidson, translation and interpretation are not the same. Moreover, with the shift to interpretation Davidson’s fourth argument has recourse to the principle of charity, and the principle of charity is what is meant to disqualify the possibility of partial intranslatability.

Now Davidson’s third argument purported to show that complete failure of translation is impossible. Since Davidson
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agrees with the intensionalist that translation preserves meaning (the disagreement is over whether this “meaning” is intensional or extensional), he agrees that a translator’s determining whether sentences are translatable requires her determining their meaning. But, according to Davidson, a translator can determine the meaning of sentences only with the principle of charity; that principle is central to his “underlying methodology of interpretation” (1974a, 197). So, for Davidson, interpretation and translation have to happen simultaneously: interpretation requires translating the alien’s utterances into the interpreter’s own language via the principle of charity. But then, for Davidson, the translator of his third argument is the interpreter of his fourth. Davidson’s third argument against scheme-content dualism is really that it is impossible that all sentences held true are intranslatable, and so uninterpretable, by an interpreter. His fourth argument is really that it is impossible that some significant range of sentences held true is intranslatable, and so uninterpretable, by an interpreter. And Davidson, in both cases, leaves enthymematic his earlier claim that an alien’s holding a sentence true is evidence that it is true in her language.

But consider further how the two arguments relate. If partial intranslatability (by an interpreter) is impossible—if it is not the case that some true sentences are intranslatable into another language—then it must be the case that no true sentences are intranslatable. Davidson’s fourth argument would itself disqualify complete intranslatability. But this is what his third argument against scheme-content dualism is meant to do. Thus, though seemingly oblivious to the relation between them, Davidson should himself maintain that his fourth argument entails his third. Put differently, establishing that all languages are necessarily translatable, which the fourth argument claimed to do, guarantees that complete intranslatability of a language’s sentences is impossible, which the third argument claimed to show.

Moreover, should the fourth argument fail, and partial intranslatability and so incommensurability between languages be possible, then there could be partially overlapping conceptual schemes after all. Such schemes would be “intelligible [and so commensurable] by reference to the common part” (Davidson 1974a, 195), incommensurable otherwise. But then Davidson’s third argument against scheme-content dualism, that no sense can be made of how schemes are meant to conceptualize their content, would become moot: since there are schemes, albeit overlapping ones, and Davidson is committed to the view that if there are schemes, then there is content, then the dualism itself returns. Rorty, recall, was right that Davidson’s third argument merely challenges metaphors meant to explicate the dualism rather than the dualism itself; without the fourth argument,
now disqualified, the ad formulationem nature of Davidson’s third argument cannot be buttressed by the fourth. Davidson’s second argument, itself a dual of his third, would likewise become moot: even if no sense can be made of how empirical content is meant to function with a conceptual scheme, the fact remains that this content does so function—the possibility of incommensurability proves that. In the case of both the second and third arguments, the fault would not be in the duals but in our making sense of them. Finally, since Davidson’s second argument against scheme-content dualism entails his first, failure of the fourth entails failure of them all.

Is the same true of all the general arguments against scheme-content dualism? Here too all the arguments ultimately rely on some consideration of the incommensurability thesis. The first general argument against scheme-content dualism, that the dualism is problematic because it is related to a set of problematic dualisms, one of whose members Davidson identifies as analytic-synthetic dualism, concerns the incommensurability thesis insofar as both dualisms embrace the very idea of empirical content, allegedly staying constant between incommensurable conceptual schemes. But then the second general argument, that the notion of empirical content is problematic since it is unclear how content and scheme can function dualistically, is also implicated in talk of ‘incommensurability’. The third argument, that the notion of a conceptual scheme is reciprocally problematic, relies on the worry that sense cannot be made of how schemes conceptualize empirical content; the worry about incommensurability is a specific worry about how scheme and content function dualistically. Now if the fourth argument succeeds, then we must reject the claim that there are different conceptual schemes and so empirical content in the first place. The third argument, already suspect, would then become superfluous, as would the second and first. But if the fourth fails, then there can be schemes and content, and so it is beside the point that neither the third nor second can explain how they would function, itself robbing the first of its force.

6. Problems with the Fourth Argument

In both the general case and Davidson’s specific case, therefore, failure of the fourth argument against scheme-content dualism entails failure of the other three. Unfortunately for Davidson and the dualism’s other detractors, the fourth argument does fail. In fact, it does so for four reasons.

(1) Rejecting the incommensurability thesis is insufficient to reject scheme-content dualism. Suppose that the incommensurability thesis is false. Nonetheless this at most proves that there is either no or merely one conceptual scheme. The fourth argument against scheme-content therefore fails to reject the
dualism outright. Consider the dualism construed linguistically. If sentences true in one language are necessarily translatable into true sentences in any other, then this might be taken to show that these languages contribute nothing relative to which the sentences are true. But it might also be taken to show that all languages contribute the same thing relative to which sentences are true and so that there is a single conceptual scheme. In fact, Davidson’s specific version of the fourth argument, itself relying on this linguistic construal, seems to prove, if anything, that there is just such a scheme. According to him, all languages are necessarily intertranslatable, entailing that there exists a single language into which all true sentences could be translated, and so a single language—and so scheme—relative to which empirical content contributes to doxastic and sentential truth. Davidson himself, recall, had claimed: "We may identify conceptual schemes with languages, then, or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages" (1974a, 185). Davidson has shown that there is a single set of intertranslatable languages; then he has shown that there is a single conceptual scheme.

In a moment I consider Davidson’s claim that all languages are necessarily intertranslatable, and its implications for whether it makes sense to talk of conceptual schemes as a kind. First I must note that Davidson later changes his mind about identifying conceptual schemes with sets of such languages. "[If translation succeeds,” he writes, “we have shown there is no need to speak of two conceptual schemes, while if translation fails, there is no ground for speaking of two” (1974b, 243). So, according to Davidson, if an interpreter can interpret an alien’s utterances, then the interpreter cannot verify that she and the alien have different conceptual schemes. If an interpreter cannot interpret an alien’s utterances, then the interpreter cannot verify that an alien has a conceptual scheme at all. But why does this preclude the interpreter’s having a scheme? In other words, why does Davidson not take himself to have shown that there is only one scheme, common to all language-users? Davidson responds:

If I am right, then there never can be a situation in which we can intelligibly compare or contrast divergent schemes, and in that case we do better not to say that there is one scheme, as if we understood what it would be like for there to be more. (1974b, 243)

Thus, according to Davidson, if one cannot verify the existence of different conceptual schemes, then it makes no sense to say that all those interpretable have the same scheme.

Nonetheless Davidson’s reasoning falters. According to him, a conceptual scheme is meant to be the language-user’s total
contribution to sentential truth. Now suppose that Davidson continues to maintain that true sentences are necessarily translatable. It still does not follow that language-users contribute nothing to sentential truth. Sentential truth involves sentences, and these are constructed by language-users. What can be more of a contribution than a construction, taking phonemes, orthographs, or other linguistic symbols and systematically concatenating them to represent meanings (intensional or extensional)? Language must contribute something. ‘Exxon’s profits last year were over one billion U.S. dollars’ is false in British English, since there ‘a billion’ means a million million; true in American English, since there ‘a billion’ means a thousand million; and truth-valueless in Spanish, since there the string of symbols has no meaning. On Davidson’s view these languages would contribute nothing. Why does Davidson say this? He claims that sentences true in them are intertranslatable, and perhaps they are. They would then be translatable into one language. But then, if anything, Davidson proves that there is only one conceptual scheme.

Now Davidson here might dig in his heels. If there really can never be a situation in which we can verify the existence of divergent schemes, he might insist, then we really do better not to say that there is even one scheme, for we would simply have no contrast class. If intranslatable languages would serve as evidence of conceptual schemes, then, he might remain resolute, the impossibility of such evidence ought to entail the impossi-bility of there being any conceptual scheme at all. There would be no sense in talking about a conceptual scheme as constituting a kind.

I still find Davidson’s reasoning dubious, this time on two points. First, consider all material objects. If I cannot verify the existence of a different set of all such objects, then at least to me it does not seem automatically to follow that all material objects do not themselves comprise a set. This would appear to require further argument. But then Davidson would himself require further argument to show that intertranslatable languages do not themselves comprise a set and so a scheme. As far as I can tell, Davidson has never given further argument.

Second, any such argument would have to rely on Davidson’s contention that all languages are necessarily translatable. Only then would the contrast class be completely empty—of actual and possible intranslatable languages. But that all languages are necessarily translatable is difficult to accept. Translation is an empirical enterprise. It should be troubling that Davidson purports to know ahead of time that an interpreter would be able to interpret, and with it translate, any language. Of course Davidson reaches this conclusion in his fourth argument against scheme-content dualism: if languages are identified with their true sentences, and only an insignificant range of
such sentences can be intranslatable, then bracketing this range and assuming his methodology of interpretation, Davidson seems justified in claiming that languages themselves need to be translatable. He then concludes that there could never be evidence of rival schemes. Nonetheless I fail to see how this demonstrates that there are no schemes at all, and so that a conceptual scheme does not constitute a kind. Consider this time all possible worlds, and construe ‘possibility’ as broadly itself as possible. Why would these worlds not comprise a set, even though ex hypothesi there could be no other such set? But then why would all languages, necessarily translatable, not comprise a conceptual scheme, even though ex Davidson there could be no other such scheme? If there is a response in the offing, Davidson does not give it, nor have I any idea how such a response might go.

So far as I can tell, then, Davidson has failed to make the case that, even if correct, his argument establishes that there are no schemes rather than that there is merely one such scheme. Nor can Davidson take comfort in his establishing that there is merely one conceptual scheme. He himself insists: “Even those thinkers who are certain there is only one conceptual scheme are in the sway of the scheme concept; even monotheists have religion” (1974a, 184). Even monoschemers like Davidson have a scheme. Now one might counter that there being only one conceptual scheme is not so bad a result, since the incommensurability thesis would still be false. But this is not a counter that Davidson or other opponents of scheme-content dualism, pining after semantic or epistemic direct realism, would make. So Davidson’s specific argument seems at best to prove that there is only one scheme, the general argument at best that there is either no or one scheme. Both versions of rejecting the incommensurability thesis therefore fail to reject scheme-content dualism.

(2) The principle of charity, on which Davidson’s specific version of the fourth argument depends, is both too weak and too strong to allow Davidson in particular the fourth argument’s conclusion. First, the principle of charity is too weak. Regardless of whether the principle requires that an interpreter generally take sentences held true by an alien to be true by her interpreter’s lights, or that an interpreter maximize sentences held true by an alien that are true by her interpreter’s light, neither entails that no significant range of such sentences can be false by her interpreter’s lights. But this is the conclusion that Davidson claims that he needs. The solution is not to strengthen the principle either. For ‘generally’ and ‘maximize’ to have the appropriate strength, they would presumably need to entail nearly always. Yet it is even unclear that ‘nearly always’ is itself strong enough for Davidson. Why would any true sentence of a language intrans-
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latable into another language not serve as evidence of a conceptual scheme?

Second, the principle of charity is also too strong. Supposing that nearly always is a strong enough way to construe ‘generally’ and ‘maximize’, it is empirically false that it is nearly always (let alone always) the case that sentences true in one language are translatable into another. But then the principle of charity would be ill suited for Davidson’s (1967) methodology of interpretation generally. Yet Davidson sanctions use of that principle in his argument against scheme-content dualism because he claims that it is necessary to that methodology. Thus Davidson can use the principle of charity only in his work on interpretation itself (if he does not make it too strong) or not at all (if he does). Either way, his fourth argument against scheme-content dualism fails.

(3) Proponents of the incommensurability thesis, when describing sentences made in allegedly incommensurable conceptual schemes, need not be undercutting their own view, so the fourth general argument against scheme-content dualism fails. There are at least four ways of saving Whorf and Kuhn, and others describing allegedly incommensurable schemes generally, from thereby undermining the incommensurability thesis. Any of these ways if successful would show that the fourth general argument against scheme-content dualism fails. Though I cannot defend all four of them here, let me offer them at least for consideration.

First, Whorf and Kuhn might not be translating sentences that are true relative to an incommensurable scheme but reformulating such sentences within our scheme. Kuhn himself claims that post-revolutionary scientists do just this sort of reformulation when understanding pre-revolutionary scientists. Kuhn might this time himself be doing the same; Whorf could be doing likewise.

Second, Whorf and Kuhn never tell us what all Hopi, or pre-Lavoisieran, sentences mean, nor might they be able to do so. Kuhn generally argues for merely partial incommensurability, and this is consistent with his practice of translating some pre-revolutionary claims. Whorf could likewise do the same regarding his own examples.

Third, as Henderson (1994) urges, there might be looser and stricter types of translation, the former applicable to all languages, the latter only to “incommensurable” ones. Thus Davidson could be right that all languages are, and perhaps are even necessarily, translatable—in the looser sense. But Kuhn and Whorf could be right that some languages, or parts of them, are intranslatable—in the stricter sense. Moreover, Henderson observes, interpreting Whorf and Kuhn as implicitly appealing to both types of translation spares them from contradicting themselves. But then Henderson’s interpretation of Kuhn and
Whorf is more charitable than Davidson's own. So on Davidson's own grounds Henderson's work is worth closer consideration.

Henderson calls the looser type of translation 'reconstructive', the stricter 'direct'. An instance of direct translation would be from 'La neige est blanche' in French to 'Snow is white' in English. Henderson claims that in culturally close languages, like English and French, there is no need to incorporate into the translation intervening theory; anglophones and francophones share the same general world view, and so direct translation, evidenced by one-to-one translations of sentences, is the norm. Contrast reconstructive translation. Henderson, relying on Evans-Pritchard's classic ethnography (1937), gives as examples any would-be English translation of Zande sentences containing 'mangu' and 'ngua'. An alleged direct translation of sentences with these words might involve 'witchcraft substance' or 'witchcraft', and 'magic' or 'medicines', respectively. But Henderson urges that any good Zande-to-English translation would need to incorporate into the translation much zandophonic cosmology, including views on ethics, disease transmission (if it can even be called that), and incorporeality. In short, any translation of 'mangu' and 'ngua' would need to be explicitly "embedded in a web of theory" (Henderson 1994, 175), where this theory would itself need to figure in the translation. Thus unlike French-to-English, Zande-to-English would less likely involve one-to-one translation of sentences. Rather, it might take several paragraphs of English to convey the meaning of an individual Zande sentence; this is what the theory-embedding might require.

Now, according to Henderson, the possibility of either direct or reconstructive translation would be evidence of a language, while the possibility of only reconstructive translation would be evidence of an incommensurable language. Whorf and Kuhn, when describing allegedly incommensurable schemes in commensurable terms, could then be reconstructively translating their claims. Conceptual schemes and their claims would then be describable and incommensurable, exonerating Whorf and Kuhn from charges of undercutting their own view. Moreover, even the Davidsonian counter that taking the indeterminacy of translation seriously requires admitting the possibility of translating French to English sentences in a one-to-many, and Zande to English sentences in a one-to-one, manner, does not invalidate Henderson's point. Not only is it unclear how seriously one ought to take the indeterminacy thesis; Davidson in later writings himself seems not to take it as seriously as Quine did. But proponents of the thesis still agree that there are better and worse translations. Focusing on the better ones, such proponents should agree with Henderson that French-to-English permits one-to-one sentential translation more often than Zande-to-English does. So distinguishing
between types of translation—one providing evidence of a language, the other, an incommensurable language—seems a viable move.

A fourth way of saving Whorf and Kuhn from the charge of undercutting their views would be to distinguish not between different types of translation but more sharply between translation and interpretation than Davidson himself does. On this view Whorf and Kuhn, when describing incommensurable claims, do so not by translating but by interpreting them, where translation and interpretation are very different activities, and where, should translation turn out to be impossible, these interpreted claims would be incommensurable nonetheless. Kuhn (1983) defends himself against Davidson with just such a tack, linking interpretation not with translation but language acquisition. According to Kuhn, when scientists working under one paradigm interpret another, incommensurable one, and when Kuhn himself describes the process to his readers, those interpreting the new paradigm are learning a new language ab_\textit{initio} rather than how to translate the new language into their old.

Now whether or not interpretation is as closely linked to language acquisition as Kuhn maintains, it need not be as closely linked to translation as Davidson does. Consider an Einsteinian physicist interpreting Aristotle's \textit{Physics} or Kuhn trying to do the same for his readers. What would the physicist or Kuhn do? One thing that they would not do is direct translation in Henderson's sense; there would be too much background theory involved to correlate sentence to sentence. But neither would the physicist nor Kuhn stay as close to Aristotle's original intent as they would were they merely translating. It is a more hermeneutic practice than translation, whose chief purpose is to provide an objective rendering of authorial intent. In fact, interpretation, unlike translation, need not even preserve the truth-value of sentences from the original to the interpretation—were there a one-to-one correlation of sentences between them, which there probably would not be. The Einsteinian's \textit{interpretation} of Aristotle's \textit{Physics} might include her discussion of ways to understand Aristotle in light of her own theory; assuming that theory correct, then her interpretation might be true, Aristotle's original text false. Kuhn's \textit{interpretation} of past science might make sense of it in light of what present science takes for granted; sentences of the text on its own terms might then be false, sentences of Kuhn's interpretation true. And because truth-values, whose preservation would be a minimal constraint on translation, need not be preserved, interpretation would not count as translation of any sort, direct or reconstructive.

One might object that this more hermeneutic notion of interpretation is simply not Davidson's. I grant that. Nonethe-
less perhaps the notion should be ours. Such an understanding of the ‘interpretation’ of sentences in past science or culturally distant languages is identical to our commonsense understanding of ‘interpretation’ generally. When one interprets poetry or prose fiction, one does so against background theory, often by reflecting on such things as the cultural context within which the poem or story is written. When one interprets such writings, one also usually does so without unerring commitment to authorial meaning; instead one actively engages the text, and so to some degree finds her own meaning in it. Finally, sentences of poetry or prose fiction might lack truth-values altogether. But even in light of all this, poems and prose fiction can still be interpreted. So too can performing art, sculpture and painting, and music, though none of these can in any clear sense be translated. In each instance, the interpreter finds meaning; but in each instance, just as in the interpretation of past scientific writing, the interpreter relies on background theory, not exclusively on authorial intent, and not on sentential truth-values.

Thus a single notion of interpretation covers all these cases, and Davidson appears to do injustice to interpretation by divorcing it from these contexts and forcibly wedding it to translation. Further, some cultures might be so remote that in interpreting their claims contemporary anglophones would need not only to rely on extensive background theory, as reconstructive translation requires, but also to surrender unswerving commitment to authorial intent and even the preservation of truth-values. Without these, however, there remains no good sense in which these claims, though interpretable, would be translatable. If Whorf and Kuhn are interpreting, rather than translating, claims, because such claims cannot be translated, then such claims are in this sense incommensurable with their own. Whorf and Kuhn would then be guilty of interpretation but not translation. Nonetheless interpretation, if divorced from translation, is not a crime against the incommensurability thesis. Hence the incommensurability thesis remains unscathed.

Now if any of these four possibilities is correct—and there is reason to think that some are—then the fourth general argument fails.13

(4) Finally, both the general argument and Davidson’s specific argument against incommensurability are verificationist, and verificationism is suspect. Even if both versions of the argument are correct, and there can be no evidence of incommensurability, it is simply too hasty to conclude that the incommensurability thesis is false. Evidence is an epistemic notion, and its lack should not by itself be taken to disqualify the existence of conceptual schemes. Moreover, what is doing all the work in both versions of the fourth argument is verificationism. And consider just how strong that verificationism is. It
would all by itself "disprove"—in a single premise—most forms of skepticism. Surely this should give reason for pause.

Nonetheless, on behalf of the dualism’s detractors, it should be noted that a conceptual scheme is primarily something epistemic. So if there can be no epistemic access to such a scheme, then little might be gained by claiming that the scheme exists. Regardless, intuitions vary on the legitimacy of verificationism as a premise in arguing for metaphysical conclusions, and at the very least a case for verificationism about conceptual schemes needs developing. Rorty, whose intuitions are thoroughly verificationist, gives something of one, focusing on Davidson’s link between incommensurability as intranslatability:

But (to extend Davidson’s argument a bit) if we can never find a translation, why should we think we are faced with language users at all? ... Once we imagine different ways of carving up the world, nothing could stop us from attributing “untranslatable languages” to anything that emits a variety of signals. But, so this verificationist argument concludes, this degree of open-endedness shows us that the purported notion of an untranslatable language is as fanciful as that of an invisible color. (Rorty 1972, 653)

Now I doubt that this is Davidson’s verificationist argument: that allowing the possibility of incommensurable languages, and so conceptual schemes, allows anything to count as a language, and that is itself undesirable. Nonetheless opponents of scheme-content dualism—Davidson, Rorty, or otherwise—might still use it in some more developed verificationist position, though such a position is still wanting.

There is, however, a second, more problematic level of verificationism operative specifically in Davidson’s version of the argument. It concerns the existence of meanings and beliefs. Davidson’s overarching assumption that an alien’s sentences have meanings and that she has beliefs only if an interpreter can verify these is dubious. Imagine that an extraterrestrial pilots a ship to Earth but that our best interpreters cannot verify that its utterances have any meaning nor that it has any beliefs. Should we conclude that it has no beliefs or that we merely cannot verify that it has any? Faced with this extraterrestrial pilot, only a verificationist would choose the former. Likewise when Davidson writes: “If other people or creatures are in [mental] states not discoverable by these [i.e., our] methods, it cannot be because our methods fail us, but because those states are not correctly called states of mind—they are not beliefs, desires, wishes, or intentions” (1988, 40, my emphasis), only a verificationist would agree. Verificationism is again what is doing all the work in Davidson’s argument.
Now one might object that Davidson requires only that some interpreter be able to verify the extraterrestrial's meanings and beliefs. Davidsonian triangulation is triangulation—one interpreter, one alien, and one shared world. Further, the objector would continue, in the imagined case the interpreter and alien might both be extraterrestrials, so our not being able to interpret the extraterrestrial is beside the point. Its utterances, uninterpretable and so intranslatable by us, would not be uninterpretable and so intranslatable by one of its own. In short, Davidson's verificationism, though dubiously strong, is not so strong as to require that we be able to translate the extraterrestrial's utterances.

This, however, is no defense of Davidson. Far from it, it shows that Davidson's fourth argument against scheme-content dualism fails straightaway, since by Davidson's own lights intranslatability into other languages would be possible. Davidson does in fact maintain that true sentences need only to be translatable into one language; this does follow from his account of triangulation. Moreover, it follows from his reliance on Convention T: if the notion of truth cannot be divorced from that of translation, then this requires only that true sentences be translatable into one, not every, language. According to Davidson himself, therefore, intranslatability, and so incommensurability, between at least some languages is possible.

Hence on the one hand, neither the general case nor Davidson's specific case for verificationism about conceptual schemes has been made. On the other hand, whether or not Davidson's dubiously strong verificationism about meanings and beliefs is granted, incommensurability remains. But then the fourth argument, in both its versions, fails, and with it all the other arguments against scheme-content dualism fall.

7. Conclusion

What should we make of all this? Scheme-content dualism is ubiquitous in Western philosophy. Versions of it appear in fields as disparate as philosophy of mind (do brain structures put limits on how sensory input can be cognized?) and political philosophy (are there universal, or even relative, human rights through which actions must be viewed and evaluated?). Arguments against scheme-content dualism, had any succeeded, would therefore have affected the entire tradition.

In this paper, I have tried to canvass all the arguments so far given against scheme-content dualism, making explicit the connections between different moves made by different authors and paying particular attention to how those moves are themselves related to moves made by Davidson, the dualism's most determined detractor. One result of my investigations is that all the arguments so far given against scheme-content
dualism ultimately rest on doubts about the incommensurability thesis. From many there was in this sense just one. A second result is that these doubts are insufficient to cast doubt on scheme-content dualism itself. Of course other arguments against scheme-content dualism might still be forthcoming; the idea that neither scheme nor content exists is still new. Nonetheless for the sake of the dualism's detractors, one can only hope that forthcoming arguments fare better than those given so far.  

Notes

1 Citations are to the original year of publication. Page references are to the reprinted editions, if any, indicated in the list of works cited. Emphasis in quotations is in the original unless noted otherwise.

2 Davidson makes what I take to be the first, third, and fourth arguments against scheme-content dualism primarily in 1974a, the second argument primarily in 1982a, 1983, 1988, 1990a. It is unclear whether Davidson takes himself to make all these arguments. Of these four, Baghramian (1998) takes Davidson to make only the third; Baron (1994) only the third and fourth; Crumley (1989) only the third; Evnine (1991, §8.3) only the second and fourth; Henderson (1994) only the third and fourth; Kraut (1986) all four; Malpas (1992) only the first (§6.1) and third (§6.2.2); McDowell (1996, chap. 1) only the second; Nagel (1986, 90–6) only the third; Ramberg (1989, chap. 9) only the third and fourth; Rorty only the third (1979a) and fourth (1972, 1979b); Rovane (1986) only the fourth, and Soames (2003, chap. 13) only the third and fourth.

Only I take Davidson's first, second, and third arguments to rely on the fourth, and only I consider their generalized forms.

3 For Quine, these dualisms are both epistemic and semantic.

4 Cf. Quine on analytic-synthetic dualism:

[T]o each statement, or each synthetic statement, there is associated a unique range of sensory events such that the occurrence of any of them would add to the likelihood of the truth of the statement, and that there is associated also another unique range of possible sensory events whose occurrence would detract from that likelihood.... [And] as long as it is taken to be significant in general to speak of the confirmation and infirmation of a statement, it seems significant to speak also of a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, ipso facto, come what may; and such a statement is analytic. (1951, 40–1, first emphasis mine)

5 One might object that Quine found analytic-synthetic dualism untenable not because it involved empirical content but because no sharp distinction could be drawn between the duals. Nonetheless Davidson (1974a, 189) identifies both analytic-synthetic and scheme-content dualisms as dogmas of empiricism, suggesting that had Quine pushed his critique hard enough then he too would have seen that the dualisms shared an underlying problem.

6 Frege (1892) claims to show that they all refer to the True.

7 Though Kuhn (1970) argues for incommensurability largely based on how scientists working under different paradigms allegedly
perceive the world differently, and perception is an epistemic and not a semantic notion, Kuhn is still concerned with partial failure of translatability: see in particular his discussion of Newtonian and Einsteinian 'mass' (101–2). Further, Kuhn (1970, 198–204) compares successive paradigms to radically separate languages, explicitly invoking Quine’s (1960) notion of radical translation. And Kuhn (1983) takes the discussion from his 1970 (101–2), to show “why Newtonian ‘force’ and ‘mass’ are intranslatable into the language of a physical theory (Aristotelian or Einsteinian, for example) in which Newton’s version of the Second Law does not apply” (677). So Kuhn himself explicates talk of ‘incommensurability’ with ‘intranslatability’. Moreover, Kuhn (1983) even comes to replace arguments from perception with those from translatability:

Applied to the conceptual vocabulary in and around a scientific theory, the term ‘incommensurability’ functions metaphorically. The phrase ‘no common measure’ becomes ‘no common language’. The claim that two theories are incommensurable is then the claim that there is no language, neutral or otherwise, into which both theories, conceived as sets of sentences, can be translated without residue or loss. (670)

8 In the next section, I consider the objection that absent the possibility of incommensurable schemes there might still be just one scheme.

9 Davidson formulates the principle of charity differently in different places. For critical discussion of this, see Goldberg forthcoming.

10 Triangulation figures implicitly in Davidson’s account of meaning from the beginning (1967). It is explicitly introduced in 1982b and figures explicitly in 2001 generally.

11 Nonetheless see note 8.

12 For more on this, see Goldberg forthcoming.

13 A fifth, though weaker, possibility is that Whorf and Kuhn might be right about the incommensurability thesis but wrong about its concerning meaning. Besides meaning incommensurability, which would be evidenced by intranslatability, Hacking (1983, chap. 5) identifies what he calls ‘topic-incommensurability’ and ‘dissociation’, Newton-Smith (1981, chap. 7) identifies ‘value-variance incommensurability’ and ‘radical-standard variance incommensurability’, and Kuhn also has something like methodological incommensurability at work. None of these other types of incommensurability blocks translatability. One might think, therefore, that when Whorf and Kuhn translate instances of incommensurable claims, the incommensurability at hand is not meaning incommensurability at all. Then there would still be different conceptual schemes, just not ones obstructing translation. Translatability could be consistent with incommensurability.

Nonetheless relying on types of incommensurability other than meaning incommensurable to save Whorf and Kuhn from undercutting their views is problematic. On the one hand, these other types figure less centrally in Kuhn and not clearly at all in Whorf. On the other hand, it is doubtful that these other types of incommensurability sans the meaning variety would lend themselves to any interesting notion of conceptual schemes in the first place. (I thank the anonymous reviewer for both these points.)
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