Post-Davidsonianism

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1. Introduction

The pioneering work of Davidson (1967) gave rise to a productive and exciting tradition within formal semantics and especially at the interface between syntax and semantics, whereby event variables were exploited as elements of the referential ontology in the expression of the semantics of natural language. The existence of such logical elements (events, or eventuality variables) cannot seriously now be doubted, in my opinion, although many aspects of the formal theory of syntax and semantics have changed in the nearly forty years since Davidson's seminal article. The time has definitely come for a more critical and nuanced understanding of the use of eventuality variables, in the light of recent research in the field. Maienborn (this volume) is an important example of this kind of work. She takes a new look at the idea of eventuality variables and argues that the case has been overstated, that there are both empirical and conceptual reasons for denying the existence of events in the Davidsonian sense for a certain class of statives and copular predications. I wish to show in this article that Maienborn both goes too far and not far enough in deconstructing the traditional Davidsonian assumptions. Instead, I propose a Davidson-inspired method of representation which fits better with current syntactic understanding, but which is liberated from some of the assumptions and methodologies of earlier work – I call this 'Post-Davidsonianism'. I will argue that once one makes the adjustments in the Davidsonian tradition to make the idea coherent, Maienborn's arguments for introducing a new ontological type ('Kimian states') into the system disappear.

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2. Clarifying the notion of event 'argument'

The event position introduced by a predicate is functionally and logically distinct from the argument positions traditionally thought to be occupied by selected (usually DP) objects. Whereas the event position is taken to be the variable that the verb somehow describes by its lexical content, the DP argument positions are constitutive *participants* in that event and are selected by the verb. The verb cannot 'select' an event variable – it simply denotes a property of events. The traditional Davidsonian representation tends to obscure this logical (and linguistic difference).

(1) Jones buttered the bread.
$\exists e$[buttering(e, 'Jones', 'the bread')]

The Neo-Davidsonian representation does a better job of representing the logical state of affairs here, with the verb expressing a property of events simpliciter, and separate (selected) relations introducing the arguments in the syntactic sense by relating that event in particular ways to the criterial participants.

(2) Jones buttered the bread.
$\exists e$[buttering(e) & Agent(e, 'Jones') & Theme(e, 'the bread')]

In this way, the event position is more analogous to the individual variable introduced by a noun: the noun expresses a predicate over things.

(3) 'book': λx[book(x)]

This is the substance of the Davidsonian position: while nominals are inherently object or matter descriptors, verbs denote a different kind of individual which we might call 'states of affairs'. The deep difference between the two syntactic categories is the fact that verbs do not have independent identity criteria (see Baker 2003 for a claim along these lines) but crucially must build up states of affairs from their constitutive participants in a compositional way. Thus, syntactically, verbs require arguments while nominals do not.[1] Moreover, because states of affairs have

[1] Nominals of course, may also involve relational participants, as in 'book of stories', or 'John's book of stories'. The existence of the individual variable allows thematic relations to be defined with respect to it, either via lexical material (e.g. prepositions) or more abstract functional structure. But the difference is that these participants are in no way criterial or constitutive the way that they are for events.

constitutive participants, some common variable is required to link the verbal description with the participants expressed by the subject and the object that go with it. The eventuality variable is the abstract 'hook' that allows complex states of affairs to be constructed as a single denotatum. This indeed seems to be the central and conceptually important point of Davidson's original article.

Thus far, I have just been emphasising what is already well known from the literature. However, it should be clear that the above articulation at odds with the idea that some verbs 'select' an event variable and others do not, or that some verbs have an event position in their argument grid and other verbs do not.[2] Rather, the question we need to ask is do all verbs and predicates denote something of the same ontological type? This is the question which Maienborn seeks to answer in the negative.

One thing seems clear. There are certainly different *types* of events. Early work on aktionsart (since Vendler 1967) uncovered at least the difference between dynamic events on the one hand, and non-dynamic events (states) on the other. Within the dynamic events, we countenance a distinction between simple processes (activities) and processes that also include a telos (accomplishments) and perhaps also punctual transitions (achievements), all of which exhibit different behaviours with respect to linguistic diagnostics (see Dowty 1979). However, it is crucial that all of these different types of events have not so far been considered distinct ontological categories. It is even clear that certain event types seem to be complex in that they contain more than one sub-event. Accomplishments for example are now commonly assumed to consist of both a process subevent and a result subevent (Parsons 1990, Pustejovsky 1991, Higginbotham 1999). But once again, the accomplishment verb type is not a

[2] This is often the way that the question is asked in the debate on the difference between 'stage'-level and 'individual-level' predicates. Higginbotham and Ramchand 1997 tried to show that this way of asking the question was misguided. Ramchand 1996 proposes a syntactic account of the difference between the two types of predication without giving up the idea that there is some variable for 'states of affairs' that is necessary for building up a complex description in the first place. In brief, the idea is that individual-level predications are categorical (in the sense of Sasse 1987) and project an individual variable as the outer subject of predication or 'topic', whereas stage level sentences are thetic, and project an event variable as their 'topic' variable.

distinct ontological category, but a complex event form constructed from ontological entities we already acknowledge to exist.

Once these decompositional subtleties are acknowledged, the connection to the syntax becomes even more interesting. For example, the simple manner verb 'hammer' is consistent with an atelic interpretation, or more accurately, with an interpretation whereby no set result state is implied (4a), whereas the addition of a resultative adjectival predicate creates a more complex accomplishment in the syntax (4b).

(4) a. John hammered the metal.
    b. John hammered the metal flat.

The logic of eventuality decomposition demands that the event position of the former sentence is topologically and linguistically different from the complex event position of the latter, having different constitutive properties.

The demand for different eventuality variables at different levels of structure can also be seen with the addition of aspectual operators like the progressive in English (5b), and the habitual past tense (5c) (or whatever operator induces that interpretation) (see also de Swart 1996). For example, the complex event of habitually crossing a street has different constitutive temporal properties and different cooccurrence restrictions with modifiers than the simple non-iterated accomplishment version in (5a).

(5) a. John crossed the street (in two minutes).
    b. John was crossing the street (*in five seconds/for only five seconds, before he changed his mind).
    c. John crossed that street for years on his way to work.

Thus, modern research at the syntax-semantics interface and on the interpretation of functional projections makes it more difficult to think of the event as a monolithic entity that is introduced once and for all by a verb. The structure of the clause is such that the event variable is constantly being modified and manipulated, and that various functional positions in the clause are semantically responsible for introducing those changes (cf. Kratzer 1996, Ernst 2001, for example).

I would like to claim that there is an emergent view in the field which is moving away from the autonomous lexical view of early Davidsonianism and towards a more generative-constructional one, taking seriously recent advances in our syntactic understanding of the functional hierarchies of

the clause. This is the view that I am calling Post-Davidsonianism: the event variable is still the basic variable type that is at the basis of the clause, but it is subject to internal complexity and it is modified/updated through various functional projections. This view is more articulated than the original position in the literature, but its central assertion is still that the event variable is the linguistically real and active heart of the clause, which allows embedding within a temporal frame and ultimately, the construction of propositions.

3. A defense of abstract objects

The post-Davidsonian position opens up the philosophical can of worms discussed briefly by Maienborn, concerning the 'identity criteria' for events which as she rightly points out have proven to be difficult to articulate. I agree with her (and other work such as Parsons 1990, Carlson 1998 and Asher 2000) that 'crucial for our notion of eventualities ... is their inherently relational character'. However, precisely because of this factor, I disagree with her that as linguistic entities, eventuality variables denote real objects embedded in space and time, with inherent identity criteria. In fact, there is some evidence that eventuality variables differ from individual variables in not having stable identity criteria. Whereas variables introduced by nominal referring expressions can be followed up anaphorically using the adjective 'same', the equivalent adverb does not seem to be possible with verbally described entities. The following examples and argumentation are due to Øystein Nilsen (p.c.).

(6) John saw an elephant yesterday, and Mary saw *the same one* today.

(7) ??John fought in the pub yesterday, and Mary fought the same.

In (6), the entity Mary saw is the same one that John saw, but in (7), if it is grammatical at all, cannot mean that Mary was engaged in the very same fighting event that John was. There is actually no way of expressing the latter thought in English, or in the other languages I am familiar with. The modifier 'in the same way', refers to sameness of manner, not sameness of event. Moreover, to say that the adjectival nature of 'same' is what precludes it from being applied to verbal entities, is to beg the question, because it does not explain the systematic gap of why there should be no adverb that performs the analogous function.

On the other hand, Maienborn advocates the introduction of an alternative ontological entity, the Kimian state, which is a 'temporally bound property exemplification'. For her, these states are abstract objects, unlike the Davidsonian eventualities which are real-world spatiotemporal entities. She makes a firm ontological distinction between the two types of situational variable, saying that only Kimian states are 'mental constructs introduced primarily for efficient communication'. However, if one admits the possibility that eventuality variables too are abstract objects, (and I do not see that the philosophical arguments can possibly distinguish between the two types of case) then some of the motivation for introducing Kimian states disappears. The similarities between Kimian states in Maienborn's approach and the Davidsonian eventualities are that they can be located in time, and that they are accessible for anaphoric reference. To this I would add (i) that they have constitutive participants and (ii) they are accessible to higher cognitive operations. The differences adduced by Maienborn are that Kimian states, being abstract objects, are not accessible to direct perception and therefore canot serve as infinitival complements of perception verbs and do not combine directly with locative modifiers. The question is really whether these differences justify the increase in ontology that Maienborn advocates. Rather, the differences should be seen as evidence that the criterial properties of events do not involve perceptibility, or spatial locatability, but are rather the more abstract things that both types have in common: the constitutive participants, the accessibility to higher cognitive operations, and the inherent locatability in time.

With this in mind, I turn to a discussion of Maienborn's empirical diagnostics that distinguish copular sentences and certain states on the one hand from D-states and dynamic eventualities on the other. In the next section I will argue that the differences, though real, do not justify an increase in ontology, but should be captured by acknowledging that different types of eventualities have different linguistic properties and different levels of internal complexity.

4. Assessing the empirical arguments

The force of Maienborn's position depends on us accepting the legitimacy of the following diagnostics for eventualities, repeated from that work here as (8).

(8) *Linguistic Diagnostics for Eventualities*

a. Eventuality expressions can serve as infinitival complements of perception verbs.
b. Eventuality expressions combine with locative and temporal modifiers.
c. Eventuality expressions combine with manner adverbials, instrumentals, comitatives etc.

I will take each of the diagnostics in turn. The first one, (8a) is based on a misunderstanding of the original intent of examples such as that found in Higginbotham 1983: the interpretation of perception complements requires the linguistic accessibility of the eventuality variable, since it is this entity that is being perceived; the failure to appear as the complement of a perception verb, however, does not immediately show that an eventuality variable is not present, since there might easily be independent factors that make an event variable unsuitable as the complement of these particular perception verbs. Also, it is not necessary, or even desirable, to assume that a criterial property of the Davidsonian variable (unlike the 'Kimian' state) is that is directly accessible to perception. Maienborn in fact concedes that eventuality variables are present in all dynamic events, but even for these, it is possible to construct contexts where the perception complement seems infelicitous, as in, *I saw John decide to go on holiday*, where all John did was think through all the consequences and come to a conclusion in the privacy of his own thoughts.

While the distributional properties of perception complements are too complex to do justice to here, it seems more likely that the explanation for the ungrammaticality of certain copular clauses in this position lies (see Gee 1975, Emonds 1976, Akmajian 1977 for early discussion) more squarely within the domain of syntax and its interface with the semantics. Maienborn assumes that the copula itself is the element which would introduce the eventuality variable and that it occurs at the same level of structure as a main verb. However, this is not clearly the correct assumption, and it does make a difference to the argumentation. Heycock 1994, Heycock and Kroch 1999 and others assume that there is a null predicational head in copular sentences in English and that the verb 'to be' occurs higher up in the functional structure. The facts concerning ellipsis discovered by Warner (1993), seem to bear this out.

(9) a. John ran the race and Mary will ~~[run the race]~~ too.
b. John is on the boat and Mary will *(be) ~~[on the boat]~~ too.

If this is true, then there is another independent reason why copular clauses are so bad as complements of perception verbs, i.e. the higher verb selects for something syntactically smaller than the constituent that contains the copula. Notice too that the perception complements in English without the copula are usually pretty good (10) and (11), the latter adapted from Gee 1977 (making use of the anaphor 'that'/'it' respectively to refer back to the eventuality in the perception complement).

(10) It is true that John saw [Mary tired]. (But I know *that* has only happened once.)

(11) I saw John inside the box, and Mary saw it too.

There are also some interesting examples, with 'there-insertion', where the complement is clearly non-dynamic, allows the copula, and yet appears perfectly felicitously as the complement of a perception verb (12) (see Gee 1975 for examples and discussion).

(12) I've never seen there be so many complaints from students before.

Whatever the correct analysis of these structures turns out to be, they indicate that the presence of either an adjectival predicate, or a PP predicate with or without the copula, does not automatically preclude them from appearing as the complement of perception verbs. Also, given that complex dynamic events like 'deciding' are sometimes difficult to perceive, and that copular predications like 'being on the table' are always easy to perceive, means that the distinction also cannot be related to some ontological difference in perceptibility or 'locatability' in real space and time.

In contexts where the selecting verb is different, clausal complements containing copular 'be' are in fact perfectly grammatical (13).

(13) I wanted [John (to be) dea/off my ship/president.

I assume that Maienborn would analyse the situational object required here as a 'Kimian' state, which is possible because is does not need to be 'perceived'. However, it means that basic thematic requirements of a higher verb like 'want' must be satisfied by a variable that is only introduced as part of the discourse representation (see comments in section 5, for further discussion of this point).

The second and third diagnostics can be discussed together. Accepting them as diagnostics requires us to accept the premise that all eventualities must be modifiable by modifiers of all types, and particularly by locative and temporal modifiers. But under a post-Davidsonian view, combined with an understanding of the hierarchical restrictions on adverbial modification of different types (see Cinque 1999, Ernst 2001), we would not expect all types of modifiers to be suitable for constructed events of differing levels of complexity.

In fact, there are a number of interesting issues here that are worth exploring, and which bear on the problem Maienborn raises in section 6.2 concerning the 'latent infinite regress of eventualities'. The classic Neo-Davidsonian treatment of a sentence such as (14) is shown below.

(14) Jones buttered the toast at midnight with a knife.
∃e[buttering(e) & Agent(e, 'Jones') & Theme(e, 'the toast') & at-midnight(e) & with-a-knife(e)]

Maienborn complains, following criticisms by Bennett 1988: "But what prevents us from taking the fact that e has a certain property to introduce another eventuality? . . . creating an infinite regress of eventualities?". But I don't see what the problem is, because that is precisely what we need to be able to do in a compositional post-Davidsonian framework. In other words, we have seen arguments that at different levels of the syntactic structure, updated eventuality variables do need to be constructed. We need not be afraid of the notion of 'infinite' regress because we already know that the language as a system contains infinite recursive potential, and it may be true that there is no inherent limit to the number of different adverbs we might add to a simple verbal predicate. Infinite regress is a *good* result, and moreover it will allow us to capture certain scopal effects of modifiers that are not possible under the classical neo-Davidsonian system. While the adverbs in (14) above operate on fairly independent semantic dimensions, the examples in (15) are more telling.

(15) a. Jones buttered the toast quickly with the tiny knife.
b. Jones buttered the toast with the tiny knife quickly.

In (15a), it was the buttering of the toast that was quick (for a toast-buttering) and moreover it was done with a tiny knife – how

impressive of Jones to achieve the requisite speed with such a small implement! On the other hand (b) means that the quickness of Jones action is relativised to toast-butterings with tiny knives, and is perfectly consistent with that action taking longer than it would have if he had had a normal sized butter spreader. Examples like this, and more obvious ones where the actual positions of the adverbials are forced in a particular order, make it plausible that the example such as in (15a) should be represented using at least two, but related, eventuality variables.[3]

(16) $[\![$jones butter the toast quickly with a tiny knife$]\!] =$
$\lambda e'' \exists e' \exists e$[buttering(e) & Agent(e, 'Jones') & Theme(e, 'the toast') & Constitutive-Event(e′,e) & quickly(e′) & Constitutive-Event(e″,e′) & with-a-tiny-knife(e″)]

The point of modificatory elements in arguments for the Davidsonian variable is not so much that they pick up on particularly spatiotemporal properties of that variable, but that a common representational object is required to link together the aspects of the description that are constitutive. This leaves it open that different kinds of events would be compatible with different kinds of modifiers. Once this point is conceded, diagnosing whether a particular natural language form is event-denoting or object-denoting will depend on whether they are best interpreted as inherently relational states of affairs linguistically, or as autonomously identifiable objects. Copular predications can contain nominal ingredients as well as adjectival and prepositional ones. However, if we assume an abstract predicational head for all of these cases, it is plausible to assume that the predicational head is inherently relational or eventive in the same way that verbal heads are. This makes sense of copular predications as the complement of verbs like 'want', as well as the fact that they have constitutive participants.

[3] I assume that in certain cases, and within a certain local domain of modification, the straightforward conjunctive strategy from classic Neo-Davidsonianism might be appropriate. At higher levels of modification, a 'new' more complex event is formed with internal structure, allowing scopal facts and selectional facts to be accounted for. I leave it open here exactly what the structural correlates of this distinction are – the minimal assumption would be that the relevant local domain is XP.

5. On the representation of Kimian states

Let us consider the representation that Maienborn offers for a simple copular predication containing an adjective. The forms in (17) are repeated from Maienborn, this volume (her example (55)).

(17) a. Carol ist müde.

b.	[$_{V'}$ müde sei]	$\lambda x \lambda z[z \approx [\text{TIRED}(x)]]$
c.	[$_{VP}$ Carol müde sei]	$\lambda z[v : z \approx [\text{TIRED}(v)], \text{CAROL}(v)]$
d.	[$_{IP}$ Carol ist müde]	$[s^{z}, v : s \approx [\text{TIRED}(v)], \text{CAROL}(v)]$

To recapitulate the Davidsonian position I have been pursuing: in the case of nouns, the obligatory argument variable can be thought of as the individual referent being described as the noun; in the case of dynamic verbs the variable is the abstract object, a 'a state of affairs', that the verb describes. In each of these two clear cases, the *participants* in the state of affairs, or relational participants in the case of the noun, have a different status and are linked to the main variable by thematic role relations of different types. Turning to the semantics given above, the adjective *tired* is represented 'nominal'-style, with a single individual level variable. This is consistent with the old tradition of considering both adjectives and nouns as semantic elements of type $\langle e,t \rangle$, but it obscures the difference between the two types of category linguistically. Intuitively, one might argue that the relation between 'x' and the property of being *tired* is different from the relation between x and the nominal *book*, as in (3). In particular, given the crosslinguistic overlap between adjectives and stative verbs, it might make sense to represent adjectives as describing an abstract eventuality (property-state, in this case), which has one constitutive participant, the 'holder' of the state, or FIGURE of the state description (after Talmy 1978). Recall, the hypothesis here is that nominals are inherently identifiable individuals and do not have constitutive participants. Thus, nominal predication will not be possible in a direct sense, but will have to be combined with functional linguistic material to establish a relational dependency. There is empirical evidence from a wide range of languages to support the idea that nominal predication is linguistically different from adjectival predication. Adger and Ramchand (2003) give arguments from Scottish Gaelic that nominals in particular pose challenges for predication that can only be solved by proxy predicational categories and/or the addition of special

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linguistic functional structure.[4] To give a simple pair of examples from Scottish Gaelic, the predicate in a simple present tense sentence containing the auxiliary *bith*-'be', can be an aspectual phrase (18a), a prepositional phrase (18b), an adjectival phrase (18c) but never a nominal phrase (18d).

(18) a. Tha mi ag òl leann
be-PRES I PROG drink-NONFINITE beer
'I am drinking beer.'

b. Tha mi anns a'chidsin
be-PRES I in the-kitchen-DAT
'I am in the kitchen.'

c. Tha mi sgith
be-PRES I tired
'I am tired.'

d. *Tha mi tidsear/an tidsear
be-PRES I teacher/the teacher
'I am a teacher/the teacher.'

To construct a sentence with a nominal predicate, the noun must be embedded within extra functional structure (here homophonous with a preposition).

(19) Tha mi 'nam thidsear
be-PRES I in + my teacher
'I am a teacher.'

Maienborn seems to be making a deep ontological distinction between dynamic verbs (and D-states) on the one hand, and stative verbs and be-predications on the other. However, the differences between adjectives and nouns seem to be at least as linguistically real as the differences she chooses to emphasise. The Davidsonian position concedes the differences between states and dynamic predications, but denies that the difference is ontological. Rather, the main ontological difference remains the one between individual variables and eventuality variables.

The second aspect of the representation in (17) that I wish to take issue with is the invocation of the $\approx$ relation. Crucially, Maienborn needs the

[4] I use Scottish Gaelic here because the distinctions are less overtly manifested in English, which seems to have more nonovert functional structure in both the nominal and predicational domains (but see Heycock 1994 for a more detailed discussion of copular small clauses in English).

semantics to have access to a variable corresponding to the Kimian state, because it can be shown to be available for anaphoric reference. However, instead of allowing it into the representation as the abstract entity described by a lexical item or abstract predicational head, she claims it is introduced as a part of the inferential system, at the level of discourse representation. But the $\approx$ relation is not a post-syntactic contextually driven operation in any sense that I can figure out: it must be accessible not just for discourse reference, but also for anchoring to tense and temporal modifiers, and it must be introduced at a particular level of structure. This is yet another mysterious addition to our ontology, even though we already have in our system the Davidsonian eventuality variables that have all the compositional properties we need. A relaxation of the concreteness and spatiotemporal particularity that Maienborn seems to assume for the eventuality variable would have all the consequences for compositionality that she needs without any ad hoc increase in ontological complexity.

6. Conclusion

To summarise, the modern Davidsonian already acknowledges a plethora of different types of eventuality variables introduced at various heights in the syntactic structure and with increasing articulation and degrees of complexity. Coocccurence with different types of modifiers does not force the Davidsonian into ontological profligacy, but into a more abstract understanding of what a state of affairs is linguistically, and how it interacts with syntactic representations. The state descriptions that Maienborn discusses and the linguistic peculiarities they exhibit are important evidence for the core properties of what is plausibly the most atomic or simplest kind of eventuality.

On the other hand, the reasons for unifying all of these cases rest on the idea that there is a fundamental linguistic difference between events and individuals, where the former type of abstract object is inherently relational (has constitutive participants), and the latter type of object has autonomous identity criteria.[5] In all cases of eventualities, the evidence is

[5] This is reminiscent of Frege (1980) and the distinction between saturated and unsaturated entities, translated into an ontological distinction between individual and event.

that there is a linguistically real variable position which provides the central anchor for constitutive relations, and which is accessible for modification and referential access during the course of a syntactic derivation.

As a concrete suggestion for what we might consider to be the criterial definition of an eventuality variable, I offer the following (20).

(20) *Definition of Eventualities*
Eventualities are abstract entities with constitutive participants, and with a constitutive relation to the temporal dimension.

Under this understanding of events, the linguistic distinctions Maienborn points out are not evidence for expanding our ontology, but for a more detailed linguistic understanding of what it means to be an event, and how it relates to syntactic composition.

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