

## Handout for “Does Language Exist”

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Donald Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”, *Truth, Language and History: Philosophical Essays*

“I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in language; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to convention.” (last paragraph of essay)

Carnap, “Principle of Tolerance,” from *The Logical Syntax of Language*

When first stating this principle, Carnap writes: “*It is not our business to set up prohibitions but to arrive at conventions.*” (ibid., 51) The injunction against ‘prohibitions’ he later expresses in the following way: “*In logic, there are no morals.*” (ibid., 52)

W.V. Quine, “On the Reasons for the Indeterminacy of Translation,” *The Journal of Philosophy* (1970) 67:178-183, pp. 180-81.

“The problem is not one of hidden facts, such as might be uncovered by learning more about the brain physiology of thought processes. To expect a distinctive physical mechanism behind every genuinely distinct mental state is one thing; to expect a distinctive mechanism for every purported distinction that can be phrased in traditional mentalistic language is another. The question whether, in the situation last described, the foreigner *really* believes *A* or believes rather *B*, is a question whose very significance I would put in doubt. This is what I am getting at in arguing the indeterminacy of translation.”