Expressive vs. Explanatory Deflationism About Truth

It has become customary to refer to a class of theoretical approaches to truth as 'deflationary'. Broadly disquotational theories are typically taken as paradigms.[1] In this paper, I offer three suggestions concerning deflationism. First, I want to recommend a particular form of deflationary theory of the use of the word 'true' and its cognates, which I have developed in more detail elsewhere: the anaphoric approach. I will describe that approach in general terms, and rehearse some of the considerations that lead me to see it as both technically and philosophically more satisfying than standard disquotational approaches. Next, I argue that, so understood, 'true' plays a crucial expressive role. Adding such a locution to a language substantially increases its overall expressive resources and capabilities. Thus one should not take a deflationary attitude toward the *expressive* role of 'true'. Finally, I describe the sense in which I think one should take a deflationary attitude toward the *explanatory* role of 'true'. Playing the expressive role distinctive of truth locutions disqualifies them from being understood as expressing concepts on which to base certain kinds of global explanations of propositional contentfulness in general. In particular, one is debarred from pursuing an order of explanation that seeks to render the notion of propositional contentfulness intelligible in terms of a prior concept of truth conditions. This is not, however, to say that the notion

---

[1] The most complete presentation of a disquotational theory is Paul Horwich *Truth* [Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990]. For an interesting discussion, see Marian A. Davies *Correspondence and disquotation : an essay on the nature of truth* [Oxford University Press, 1994]

of truth conditions can be of no explanatory use whatsoever. I will discuss some of the more localized explanatory projects in which that concept can serve. I close by pointing out a direction in which such an explanatory (but not expressive) deflationist about truth might look for some fundamental semantic concepts to use in global explanations of contentfulness, once truth is ruled out.

I. The Anaphoric Account of the Expressive Role of 'True'

The most sophisticated and successful account I know of the expressive role of the concept of truth—of what one is *doing* in deploying truth talk—is an *anaphoric* theory. Such theories originate with Grover, Camp, and Belnap's *prosentential theory of truth*. The version I favor understands locutions such as "…is true" and its relatives as *proform-forming operators.* In the simplest case, "That is true," is a *prosentence*, which relates to, and inherits its content from, an anaphoric antecedent—for instance someone else's tokening of "Snow is white,"—in the same way that a pro*noun* such as 'he' relates to and inherits its content from an anaphoric antecedent—for instance, someone else's tokening of 'Tarski'.

As the authors of the original theory introduce them by analogy to pronouns, prosentences are defined by four conditions:

- They occupy all grammatical positions that can be occupied by declarative sentences, whether free-standing or embedded.

- They are generic, in that *any* declarative sentence can be the antecedent of some prosentence.

- They can be used anaphorically either in the lazy way or in the quantificational way.

- In each use, a prosentence will have an anaphoric antecedent that determines a class of admissible sentential substituends for the prosentence (in the lazy case, a singleton). This class of substituends determines the significance of the prosentence associated with it.

Anaphora is a relation according to which the content of one tokening is determined by its relation to another tokening or class of tokenings: its anaphoric antecedent(s). The anaphoric dependent is *not* in general replaceable by its antecedent. The cases where it is are what Geach calls the 'lazy' cases. Thus in

1)   # Have I read the book? I haven't even taught it yet! #[2]

the anaphorically dependent expression tokening 'it' can be replaced by another tokening of the same type as its anaphoric antecedent tokening 'the book' without altering the sense of the remark. By contrast, in

2)   # Yesterday I met an economist. The economist told me that he

believes the Chinese will be forced to devalue the renminbi. #

---

[2]   In discussing anaphoric connections across sentences, it is convenient to follow Charles Chastain (in his seminal work "Reference and Context" (in Keith Gunderson, ed. *Language, Mind, and Context*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 7 [University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1975], pp. 194-

the anaphoric dependents that form the later elements of the anaphoric chain cannot be replaced by their antecedents without altering the sense of the discourse. Saying

> 3)   # Yesterday I met <u>an economist</u>. <u>An economist</u> told me that <u>an economist</u> believes the Chinese will be forced to devalue the renminbi. #

does not—as the original does—commit one to its being the *same* economist one met, was told by, and who has views about devaluation of the Chinese currency. The anaphoric dependents inherit their content from their antecedents, but some expressions (such as 'an economist') can grammatically play the role *only* of initiating anaphoric chains, while others (such as 'he') can grammatically play the role *only* of continuing them. This is true even when the anaphoric dependent precedes its antecedent in the discourse, as in

> 4)   # Although <u>she</u> didn't want to, <u>the mathematician</u> was obliged to rework her proof. #

In the category of pro*sentences*, instead of pro*nouns*, a case involving lazy anaphora corresponding to (1) might be

> 5)   # Hegel said "<u>Truth is a vast Bacchanalian revel, with not a soul sober</u>," and I believe <u>it is true</u>. #

According to the prosentential theory in its original form, the prosentence "it is true," in (5) functions so as to give the second conjunct the sense of

> 6)   …and I believe truth is a vast Bacchanalian revel, with not a soul sober.

269.) in using '#' quotes to mark of discourses containing multiple sentences, perhaps uttered by different interlocutors.

A case like (2) might be something like

> 7) # <u>One of Hegel's notorious remarks about truth</u> is hard to
>
> understand, but I believe <u>it is true</u>. #

This is *not* equivalent to

> 8) # <u>One of Hegel's notorious remarks about truth</u> is hard to
>
> understand, but I believe <u>one of Hegel's notorious remarks about truth</u>. #

For just as the anaphoric relation in (2) does, and the mere repetition in (3) does not,

settle it that the *same* economist is being discussed throughout, (7) does and (8) does not

settle it that the *same* notorious remark of Hegel about truth is both hard to understand

and endorsed by the speaker. Once again, backwards anaphora is possible:

> 9) # Even though for all I know, <u>it is true</u>, I will never admit that I
>
> understand <u>that remark of Hegel's about truth</u>. #

The authors of the original version of the prosentential theory wrestled all sentences

involving 'true' into a form in which their single prosentence "it (or that) is true,"

appears—typically by seeing a disguised propositional quantification. So

> 10) "Snow is white," is true.

is read as

> 11) For any sentence, if that sentence is "<u>Snow is white</u>," then <u>it is
>
> true</u>.

I have urged elsewhere[3] that it is preferable to understand "…is true" as *a prosentence-*

forming operator, which applies to a noun phrase specifying an anaphoric antecedent,

---

[3] "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy vol. XII: Realism*; 1988 pp. 75–93., and in Chapter Five of *Making It Explicit* [Harvard University Press, 1994].

and yields a prosentence anaphorically dependent on that specified antecedent. According to this approach, understanding a sentence in which the word 'true' (or one of its cognates) appears is a two stage process. First one must process the noun phrase to determine what sentence tokening (or class of such tokenings) it picks out as anaphoric antecedent(s). Then one determines the sense of the sentence that is anaphorically dependent on the antecedent(s). The full expressive resources of the language may be brought to bear in specifying the antecedent, so computing it from the noun phrase is not always done in the same way.

Sometimes the noun-phrase to which the prosentence-forming operator "…is true," is applied specifies its antecedent by *naming* it. Where quotation marks are used to form a quote name, the result is the sort of case that disquotational theories treat as paradigmatic. In (10), " "Snow is white," " is a quote name of the sentence "Snow is white," and the anaphora is lazy, so (10) is equivalent to

      12)   Snow is white.

But the antecedent can also be specified by *describing* it, as in

      13)   Tarski's favorite sentence is true.

which under suitable assumptions is also equivalent to (12). The antecedent can also be *paraphrased* or put in indirect discourse. Then indexicals (and choice of language) are referred to the speaker of the paraphrase, rather than the one to whom the original antecedent is attributed:

      14)   John said that he is not confused on this point, and what he said is

      true.

 Again, a *demonstrative* can be used to indicate the anaphoric antecedent of the prosentence that results from applying "…is true" to it.

> 15)   # Hegel said that a hero is not a hero to his valet, but that is not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet. That is true. #

Looking carefully, one will see that there are actually *two* prosentences in this little discourse, since the second 'that' is elliptical for "that is true." In this case the anaphoric chain is extended, as when one tokening of 'he' or 'it' has another such tokening as its immediate antecedent, but is thereby linked to the antecedent of that anaphor.

The antecedent of the prosentence can also be specified by a noun phrase that is itself an anaphoric dependent—now a pro*noun* whose antecedent is a sentence specification, perhaps a name or a description. Thus (7) can be understood as involving the application of the prosentence-forming operator "…is true," to the pronoun 'it'. Computing the antecedent of the resulting prosentence is now itself a two stage process. First one must find the noun phrase that is the antecedent of 'it', namely a tokening of "one of Hegel's notorious remarks about truth." This is a description of a sentence uttering or inscription—perhaps a tokening of "Truth is a vast Bacchanalian revel, with not a soul sober." Understanding the description in this way commits one to understanding the assertion of "it is true" in (7) as having the sense of an endorsement of the claim that truth is a vast Bacchanalian revel with not a soul sober. According to this reading, understanding the "it is true," in (7) requires discerning and processing *two* anaphoric chains, one linking noun phrases and ending in the anaphorically dependent pro*noun* 'it',

and the other linking sentences and ending in the anaphorically dependent pro*sentence* "it is true."

The second stage in interpreting a truth claim is determining the sense of the prosentence, after an antecedent for it has been settled on. In what we can call 'strictly', 'directly', or 'syntactically' lazy cases, the prosentence can simply be replaced by its antecedent, as in (5) and (6), and (10) and (12), which will preserve all relevant semantic properties. In what could be called 'broadly', 'indirectly', or 'semantically' lazy cases, the prosentence can be replaced (again preserving all relevant semantic properties) by any sentence that has the same content as the antecedent. Doing this can require the same sorts of transformation of indexicals and of language as is required in indirect discourse in general. So in the direct discourse equivalent reported in indirect discourse in (14)

> 16)   # John: "I am not confused on this point."
>
>   Bob: "What John says is true."   #

Bob's remark is not equivalent to his saying "I am not confused on this point." It is equivalent, in his mouth, to "John (or he) is not confused on this point." And in (8), (9), and (10), we should keep in mind that Hegel's remarks were made in German, and will need to be translated into English equivalents. (This point was fudged in relating (12) and (13), since Tarski's favorite sentence—even according to the fantasy being pursued—would not have been (12), but its Polish equivalent.)

As in the pronominal case, the interpretation of prosentences bound by *quantificational* antecedents is yet more complex.

17)   Every sentence Hegel wrote is true.

This is usefully thought of in the expanded, explicitly conditional form

18)   For any sentence, if Hegel wrote it, then it was true

The immediate anaphoric antecedent of the prosentence is picked out by the pronoun 'it' that occurs in it, which is linked to the 'it' in "Hegel wrote it." This link determines the instances of the quantification, such as

19)   If Hegel wrote "Die Vernunft ist Bewusstseins Gewissheit,

alle Realität zu sein," then it is true.

By combining various considerations advanced above, we can determine the sense of claims like this. By uttering (17), the speaker commits himself to all substitution instances of (19)—all the claims that have this form.

There is one further sort of complication in settling the sense of the prosentence at the second stage—after one has picked out an anaphoric antecedent at the first stage. Besides taking into account the significance of the aforementioned distinctions between syntactically lazy, semantically lazy, and quantificational anaphoric connections to the antecedent, one must look at verbal modifications of the prosentence itself.

20)   Before Weierstrass, mathematicians believed <u>that every continuous</u>

<u>curve must be somewhere differentiable</u>, but he showed that <u>that is _not_</u>

<u>true</u>.

Here the crucial point is that such uses of 'true' be construed as having sentential operators applied to the underlying prosentence. So the final clause of (20) is understood as

21)   Not (it is true).

The whole thing then has the sense of

22)   Not (every continuous curve must be somewhere differentiable).

The verbal modifications indicating the application of sentential operators to prosentences must be handled the same way in sentences involving tense and modality, as in

23)   What Bismarck said about France in 1870 *was* true then.

and

24)   The sentence at the top of p. 23 of this book *might* be true.

In each case, the modifier is to be thought of as applied *after* the antecedent has been determined, *to* the content inherited from that antecedent.

From the point of view of this analysis, orthodox disquotationalist accounts have a number of deficiencies:

- They lose the anaphoric link between the prosentence formed using 'true' and its antecedent(s). It is not in general enough for a theory to entail simply that the two sentences have the same sense. That one *inherits* its sense from the other can also make a difference, just as we saw at the level of pro*nouns* in examples (2) and (3). I'll say a bit more about this below while discussing the role played by anaphora in securing interpersonal communication.

- The only cases that are literally disquotational are those in which the anaphor picks out its antecedent by offering a quote name of it, as in (5) and (10). Even the shift from direct (quotational) to indirect discourse—from something like (10) to

something like (14)—requires more than just dis*quotation*. For here the paraphrase relation must be invoked to acknowledge that there is really a *class* of anaphoric antecedents to be taken into account, since there can be tokenings of many types that all count as sayings *that-p*. As one moves further away from quote-naming, for instance to picking out the antecedent tokenings by *describing* them (as in (13), (23), and (24)) the model of disquotation becomes correspondingly less useful in guiding us through the computation of antecedents. Here disquotation simply offers a bad theory of the process of determining the anaphoric antecedent. For in fact, prosentences can use all the referential apparatus of the language to do that job.

- This disability leads directly to another, which concerns the next stage of interpretation. For one can no more more 'disquote' the demonstrative 'that' in "That is true," than one gets to a statement of Goldbach's conjecture by disquoting the expression "Goldbach's conjecture" in "Goldbach's conjecture is true."

- Treating disquotation as a paradigm depends on a *repetition* model of anaphora: one in which the expression containing the anaphor is to be understood by *replacing* it with (another tokening of the same type as) its antecedent. But not all pro*nouns* should be understood as working in the narrowly or syntactically lazy way, and the same goes for the pro*sentences* formed using 'true'. This fact is perhaps most evident when the proform is functioning quantificationally, but it appears already where the anaphorically dependent and antecedent tokenings are uttered by different speakers (or differ in some other index, such as time) and the antecedent contains indexical or token-reflexive expressions such as 'I', 'now', or 'that'. (And again if different languages are involved.) Since anaphora is a relation between *tokenings*, the use of

tokenings of types such as 'That is true,' as a response to a tokening of 'I am hungry,' can be construed correctly—just as 'he' can have 'I' as its antecedent without thereby referring to whoever uttered 'he'. An incautiously stated disquotational theory would get these indexical cases wrong.

- Disquotational theories do not sufficiently articulate the process of computation of an antecedent and inheritance of content from it to indicate the role in that process of sentential modifiers applied to the prosentence formed using 'true': talk about what is *not* true, or *was* or *will be* true, or about what *might* or *must* be true.

In sum, disquotational theories ignore three crucial dimensions of fine structure that are integral to the anaphoric approach: the different ways an antecedent can be picked out (not just by quote names), the different sorts of content inheritance (not just lazy), and the different ways in which the content of the prosentence can be related to the content of the antecedent (verbal modifications may be needed). Along all these dimensions the account of 'true' as a prosentence-forming operator is more detailed and articulated, and offers more step-by-step guidance for actually determining the sense of the whole range of expressions in which 'true' can occur.

Another advantage, which I believe has no analogue on the disquotational side, concerns the relation between 'true' and the corresponding semantic vocabulary that applies to essentially *sub*sentential expressions: terms such as 'refers', and 'denotes'. The theory that construes 'true' as a prosentence-forming operator generalizes smoothly and naturally to a treatment of 'refers' as a pro*noun*-forming operator Its basic employment is in the construction of what may be called *anaphorically indirect definite descriptions*.

These are expressions such as "the one the chairman referred to [represented, described, talked about] as 'almost a third-rate intellect'", understood as a pronoun whose anaphoric antecedent is some utterance by the chairman. A full-fledged pronominal or anaphoric theory of 'refers' talk can be generated by first showing how other uses of 'refers' and its cognates can be paraphrased so that 'refers' appears only inside indirect descriptions, and then explaining the use of these descriptions as pronouns formed by applying the 'refers' operator to some antecedent-specifying locution.[4] Specifying the expressive role of 'refers' or 'denotes' in this way then permits the recursive generation of the Tarski biconditionals in a straightforward fashion. So treating 'true' as an operator that applies to a sentence nominalization and produces a prosentence anaphorically dependent upon the nominalized sentence token, and 'refers' as an operator that applies to an expression picking out a term tokening and produces a pronoun anaphorically dependent upon it permits a single theory form to explain the use of all legitimate semantic talk about truth *and* reference in purely anaphoric terms.

II. Why One Ought Not Take a Deflationary Attitude Toward the *Expressive* Role of 'True'

Here, then, we have seen a sketch of the expressive role that is characteristic of the expression '…is true'. It is a verbally modifiable operator that applies to a singular term that picks out a sentence tokening (or class thereof), and forms a prosentence that anaphorically depends upon that sentence tokening (or class thereof) as its antecedent(s).

---

[4] I elaborate such a theory in "Reference Explained Away," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXI #9, September 1984, pp. 469–492., and in Chapter Five of *Making It Explicit*.

Its content is to be computed on the basis of its relation to that antecedent, in any of the standard anaphoric ways, including quantificational ones. This specification of the functional role of this fundamental semantic vocabulary is sufficient both to identify expressions playing this role in alien languages, and to say what must be done to add their expressive power to languages that lack it.

It would be a travesty to say that on this view truth locutions were redundant or eliminable. On the contrary, it is evident that the availability of such idioms contributes substantial expressive power to a language. In general, this contribution is just the extension to the level of whole sentences of the expressive power provided by anaphoric mechanisms already at the level of singular terms. The most obvious dimension of surplus expressive power contributed by anaphoric mechanisms is the quantificational. Anaphora is how natural languages achieve the effects secured by variable binding in formal languages such as the first order predicate calculus. Absent such a mechanism, there is no way to express what (17) says, any more than at the subsentential level one could express

     25)   Everybody loves somebody sometime.

Tarski *proved* that the expressive power of formal languages containing "…is true" operators exceeds that of the corresponding semantically impoverished languages. This is due in no small part to the quantificational use of the prosentences such vocabulary introduces.[5] But anaphora extends the expressive power of natural languages in substantial ways that have nothing to do with quantificational uses, as well.

---

[5] The best treatment I know of these matters if Anil Gupta and Nuel Belnap's *The Revision Rheory of Truth* [MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass;1993].

For one thing, anaphoric mechanisms are what make it possible to incorporate into the language otherwise *unrepeatable* expressions, paradigmatically demonstratives (and some uses of indexicals). In

26)   # Look at <u>that</u>! I wonder what <u>it</u> was. From the glimpse I got of

the animal, <u>it</u> looked like a fox. But I'll bet <u>it</u> actually was a rabbit. #

the original use of the demonstrative acquires its content from an essentially fleeting event. The glimpse it reports is not repeatable, not available to lend content in that sort of way to other speech (and thought) acts. What makes that content available for further thought and talk is the fact that it can be picked up and preserved anaphorically, as the initiator of a chain of anaphorically dependent expressions. No language can contain deictic mechanisms without also containing anaphoric ones. For apart from their capacity to anchor anaphoric chains, and so give rise to repeatable anaphoric chains, deictic tokenings would be linguistically idle, wheels that did not engage with the conceptual machinery of thinking and talking.[6]   Similarly, the paradigmatically indexical expression 'now' is a usable expression only because the content it introduces can be made available for further use, for instance in inferences, by anaphorically dependent tokenings of 'then', 'at that time', and so on.[7]

In this way contents available to one person on one occasion even become available to other interlocutors. And this fact points to a second nonquantificational expressive

---

[6]   I have argued in further detail for this conceptual dependence of deixis on anaphora in Section IV of Chapter Seven of *Making It Explicit*. On the general points being made here, see also Sections III and V.
[7]   This is the central point I take Hegel to be making in the opening "Sense Certainty" section of the *Phenomenology*.

function of anaphora: its role in communication. This role extends beyond generating

repeatable structures (anaphoric chains) anchored by unrepeatable deictic and indexical

tokenings. Suppose B comes late into a conversation A is having:

27)   A: # …This comment by the policeman$_1$ makes him$_2$ very angry.

So then the guy$_2$ jumps out of his$_2$ car, and takes a swing at the cop$_1$! #

B might then jump into the conversation, saying something like

28)   B: # I'll bet that the cop$_1$ saw to it that that idiot$_2$ spent the night

in jail. No police officer could let his$_2$ behavior go unpunished. #

Here B, in a literal sense, does not know who he is talking about. Having missed the

beginning of the conversation, which introduced the characters, he doesn't know whether

A is talking about something he witnessed, something that was described to him, or

recounting a piece of fiction he read. He has no idea who the impulsive motorist is. Yet

by anaphorically picking up the chains A has displayed, B settles it that he is talking (and

thinking) about whoever it is that A was talking (and thinking) about. If A's claims have

truth conditions and inferential consequences, then so do B's. Communication in a

fundamental sense is secured independently of what is going on in B's head, in that B is

in a position to undertake definite commitments, to talk *about* definite individuals (in the

sense that the truth of his claims depends on how things are with those individuals), even

though he is not capable of specifying who it is he is talking about other than by appeal to

A. This capacity to talk and think without knowing what we are talking and thinking

about is an essential aspect of interpersonal communication. Indeed, I think that this is

the right way to think about what we are doing when we use proper names generally—

that our tokenings continue anaphoric chains initiated by others, perhaps others long

dead. That is, I think that the phenomena that causal or historical theories of proper name reference are getting at are best understood in terms of a more general notion of anaphoric links among expression tokenings.[8]

The crucial expressive role played by *inter*sentential, indeed, inter*personal* anaphoric links in securing communication across gaps created by differences in information and belief is reflected in a specialized *intra*sentential use of anaphora in *ascriptions* of propositional attitudes. Such ascriptions come in (at least) two forms, which can be syntactically regimented as:

29)   *De dicto*   B: A believes *that* the inventor of bifocals invented the lightning rod.

30)   *De re*   B: A believes *of* <u>Benjamin Franklin</u> that <u>he</u> invented the lightning rod.

In Quine's terminology, in the *de re* form, a singular term has been *exported* from within the 'that' clause, where it resides in the *de dicto* form. The exported term becomes the anaphoric antecedent of a pronoun that marks its place in the scope of the 'that'. What does this *ascription-structural anaphora* have to do with interpersonal anaphora? Suppose that the original remark was

31)   A: The inventor of bifocals invented the lightning rod.

Then B's utterance of (29) will be fully warranted as a correct report of the belief expressed by A's claim. But suppose A does not (at least, according to B) believe that Benjamin Franklin is the inventor of bifocals. Then it would be *in*correct for B to assert the *de dicto*

---

[8]   I have argued this point at greater length in Section V of Chapter Eight of *Making It Explicit.*

32)   A believes *that* Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod.

For if you asked A whether he believed what is expressed by the sentence used here to

characterize his beliefs, he would deny it. Where it is *B*, and not A, who believes

33)   Benjamin Franklin *is* the inventor of bifocals.

B should mark this divergence of belief by using the term 'Benjamin Franklin' in his

ascription *outside* the scope of the 'that' clause, which specifies the ascribed belief in

terms that the one to whom it is ascribed should acknowledge. This shows that the use of

that term is part of the commitment B *undertakes* in producing the ascription, not part of

the commitment he *attributes*—that is, that it is B, not A, who is responsible for using

that term to express the content of the attributed belief. (This use of 'of' is a syntactic

regimentation of what is a much messier practice in natural languages. But the

distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions that it regiments is real and important.

For present purposes it does not matter that often *de re* locutions are used to indicate

more than just the difference of perspective I've pointed to here.[9]) Ascription-structural

anaphora in *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude lets us keep our books straight on

who is responsible for what in specifications by one individual of the content of the states

and utterances of another.

All three of these substantial nonquantificational expressive functions performed by

*sub*sentential anaphorically dependent expressions such as 'he' are also performed by

sentential ones formed using 'true'. Thus someone might continue the discourse in (26)

by saying

---

[9]   I discuss it at greater length in Sections I-V of Chapter Eight of *Making It Explicit*.

34)   If <u>what you said yesterday is true</u> then it will be the first time

anyone has ever seen a rabbit around here in the middle of the day.

Here (we may suppose) the whole content of the tokening of "It was a rabbit" in (26) is

being picked up as the antecedent of a conditional, so that its consequences can by

explored hypothetically. And the conversation in (27) and (28) might be continued by

another latecomer, who heard only B's remark

35)   # C: <u>That might not be true</u>$_1$. What did <u>the guy</u>$_2$ actually do?

Here the 'that' is picking up (either anaphorically or deictically) the final sentence-

tokening of (28), and 'the guy' is anaphorically picking up the tokening of 'he' it

contains. C's whole first sentence then is anaphorically dependent on the final sentence

B uttered in (28) (though it would be a delicate matter to make this out in terms of

replaceability, since these utterances come out of different mouths, against the

background of different information sets).

The most striking parallel, however, concerns the ascription-structural anaphora. For

expressions of other syntactic categories besides singular terms can be exported from *de

dicto* ascriptions to form *de re* ones. Thus one can have:

36)   B: A believes of <u>the largest marine mammals</u> that <u>they </u>will soon

be extinct.

where A would assent to believing this about whales, but is not sure whether they are the

largest marine mammals, and

37)   B: <u>A</u>$_1$ believes of <u>Buster Crabbe's favorite form of activity</u>$_2$ that

<u>that</u>$_2$ is what <u>he</u>$_1$ should be doing three times a week.

if A does not know that Buster Crabbe's favorite form of activity is swimming. But besides common nouns and predicates, it is possible to export whole sentences. The anaphoric trace left inside the scope of the 'that' to mark the exportation is then a prosentence. So suppose that in 1951 Senator McCarthy would have assented to

38)   The spectre of communism is haunting Europe.

Someone else who knows—as McCarthy undoubtedly did not—that (38) is the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto, could report the belief McCarthy endorses in (38) by the *de re*:

39)   Senator McCarthy believed *of* <u>the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto</u> *that* <u>it is true</u>.

(And on that basis, that McCarthy believed of some of the Communist Manifesto that it was true—horrified as the senator would have been by that allegation.) Thus when whole sentences are exported into *de re* position, one uses sentences formed from 'true' in the position of ascription-structural anaphors. I think this fact is as compelling evidence as there well could be for construing such sentences as anaphoric prosentences—a striking confirmation of the analysis recommended above.

Thus the presence of 'true' and its cognates in a language adds at the sentential level all of the crucial expressive power added by anaphorically dependent expressions at the subsentential level:

- The capacity to make new quantificationally complex claims,

- The capacity to pick up deictic and other otherwise unrepeatable expressions and use them in further conceptual endeavors, paradigmatically as premises in inference,

- The capacity to secure interpersonal communication across substantial differences in belief and information among the interlocutors, and

- The capacity to make explicit who is responsible for what when one interlocutor characterizes the beliefs of another.

Anaphora generally plays an essential and ineliminable expressive role. In making possible the formation of pro*sentences* 'true' adds correspondingly significant expressive resources to the language. Though anaphora is about redundancy in the sense of repeatability, as a linguistic mechanism it is itself anything but a redundancy. I conclude that one should not be a deflationist about the *expressive* role of 'true'.

III. The Sense in which One Ought to Take a Deflationary Attitude Toward the *Explanatory* Role of 'True'

Theories of truth are often thought of as 'deflationist' in an *ontological* sense. Here the question is whether truth is a *property*, or perhaps, whether it is a *substantive* property. A feature dear to the hearts of the originators of the prosentential theory, as to disquotationalists, is the metaphysical parsimony of the approach. For what in the past were explained as attributions of a special and mysterious *property* (truth) are exhibited instead as uses of grammatical proforms anaphorically referring only to the sentence tokenings that are their antecedents. The approach is intended to be, as one might say, *ontologically deflating*—or at least unexciting. In an influential article, Paul Boghossian

has pointed out the potential for instability in an ontologically deflationary view that sees the ontological issue as a question that goes beyond asking whether'…is true' is a predicate. [10] In that case, he argues, this sort of parsimony must undercut itself and lapse into incoherence.

The general worry Boghossian raises is that the force of deflationist claims depends on the contrast between predicates (such as '...has a mass of more than ten grams') that do, and those (such as '...is true') that do not, correspond to properties. Such contrasts seem to presuppose a robust correspondence theory of the contents of some predicates—at least those the semantic deflationist finds unproblematic, paradigmatically those of natural science. But consistently following out the rejection of robust correspondence theories of content requires treating using an expression as a predicate as all there is to expressing a property, and using a declarative sentence to make a true claim to be all there is to stating a fact. So on a deflationary construal, one is forbidden to deny that the predicate '...is true' denotes a property. In this way, theories that deny that truth is a property can be seen to be conceptually unstable.

Notice, however, that this argument depends on treating "...is true" as a predicate. If it is, then since that expression is used to make claims and state facts, it must, on deflationary accounts, be taken to express a property. But the essence of the anaphoric approach to truth talk is precisely to take issue with this grammatical presupposition. According to

---

[10]   Paul Boghossian, "The Status of Content", *The Philosophical Review* April, 1990. I have in mind the argument epitomized on p. 181 in the claim that: "...the denial that a given predicate refers to or expresses a property only makes sense on a robust construal of predicate reference...But if this is correct, the

those accounts, "...is true" expresses a prosentence-forming operator. Its syntax and grammar are quite distinct from those of predicates, to which it bears only the sort of surface similarity that quantificational expressions bear to genuine singular terms. The part of speech "...is true" is assimilated to by these theories does not have a directly denotational semantics. Rather, tokenings formed using "…is true", but inherit their significance anaphorically, by an entirely distinct mechanism. So when it is claimed here that "...is true" does not express a property, this means that it is not even of the right grammatical form to do so—any more than 'no-one' is of the right form to pick out an individual, although there are some features of its use that could mislead one on this point. Further, this claim is not made ad hoc, to avoid the sort of theoretical circularity Boghossian points out, but is motivated by ground-level considerations having to do with the unifying a variety of uses of 'true' and 'refers' in a theoretically perspicuous way. Thus the anaphoric understanding of the expressive role of 'true' is immune to arguments of the sort Boghossian deploys.

According to the anaphoric approach, "…is true" is a prosentence-forming operator, and no more expresses a property than 'it' does. But the issue that people are after when the deny that "…is true" expresses a *substantive* property is not really addressed by this grammatical point. I think that issue is best understood as concerning the proper *explanatory* role that truth locutions can be called on to play. Although one who endorses the anaphoric account of the use of 'true' (and 'refers') cannot put the issue in *ontological* terms of properties (and relations)—and is to that extent an ontological

---

denial...that the truth predicate refers to a property, must itself be understood as framed in terms of a robust notion of reference…"

deflationist—such a theorist is committed to various consequences concerning the suitability of prosentences formed using 'true' for various sorts of explanatory project. In particular, telling the anaphoric story about the *expressive* role of truth commits one to seeing it as capable of playing an important role in *local* explanations of meaning, and as precluded from playing an important role in *global* explanations of meaningfulness in general. In particular, if the anaphoric account of the expressive role of 'true' is correct, then it is a fundamental mistake to understand propositional contentfulness by appealing to a prior notion of truth conditions. For the uses of 'true' that one would make in such an explanation themselves presuppose a notion of propositional contentfulness.

By "local explanations of meaning" I mean explanations of the meaning of particular expressions. It follows from the expressive role of 'true' that it is often usefully appealed to in such explanations. So we can say things like

40)   Any claim of the form ~*p* is true just in case *p* is not true,

to explain the use of the tilde, and

41)   *p entails q* just in case whenever *p* is true, *q* is true,

to explain the notion of entailment. And because we can do that, we can understand a definition such as

42)   Any natural number *n* is a prime number if and only if it is only

       evenly divisible by itself and 1,

as explaining the concept <u>prime number</u> by offering *truth conditions* for it. For a quantified biconditional like (42) is true just in case if one side of the biconditional is true, then the other is also true. These are all truth claims that can be parsed

prosententially. And thinking about the sort of quantification that is implicitly involved in such explanations of the meanings of particular expressions shows why prosentences are useful in expressing them. Thus we can see, according to the anaphoric approach to the expressive role of 'true', why explanations of meaning can naturally take the form of specifications of truth conditions: claims to the effect that sentences containing the expression whose meaning is to be explained are *true* just in case…. . Even if, as in (42) the explanation does not itself use the word 'true', in explaining what we are doing in offering such explanations, we will need to generalize in a way that requires using that term (or one of its cognates, such as 'holds', 'obtains', 'is the case' and so on). Here 'true' plays an essential role in *expressing* claims (especially general ones) about meaning.

On the other hand, if one understands the expressive role of 'true' in the way recommended here, then one is precluded from making certain other sorts of fundamental *explanatory* appeals to the notion of truth, and hence of truth conditions. In particular, I think that one cannot explain the notion of *anaphora* that is relied upon by broadly prosentential theories without appealing to an antecedent notion of *propositional content*—what in the simplest cases is inherited by a prosentence from its anaphoric antecedent. That is, one cannot entitle oneself to employ a notion of anaphora in one's semantic theory unless one is already entitled to use a notion of propositional content. Thus if one's explanation of 'true', and hence of truth conditions, is dependent upon a notion of anaphora, one cannot without circularity explain the notion of propositional

contents in terms of truth or truth conditions.[11] For those notions cannot be made

available for explanatory use in advance of an account of propositional content.

This consequence is not special to the anaphoric account of the expressive role of 'true'.

Orthodox disquotational accounts equally preclude one from treating the notion of truth,

and hence of truth conditions, as explanatory raw materials suitable for use in explaining

what it is for a sentence to mean something. For they evidently take for granted the

meanings of the sentences that are the results of disquotation. So disquotational and

anaphoric accounts are alike in their *global explanatory deflationism*. This is what I

propose one ought to mean by 'deflationism', when it is unqualified by an adjective. It is

what I think is properly seen as standing behind misleading ontological talk of truth as

not a 'substantive' property—'substantive' in this context making implicit reference to its

availability for a certain sort of explanatory project. And it is this disqualification of truth

from playing a substantive explanatory role in accounting for semantic meaningfulness in

general that tempts some to expressive deflationism: the view that truth talk adds no

significant or indispensable expressive resources to a language.

What sort of explanatory undertaking, exactly, is it that global explanatory deflationism

about truth rules out? In Fregean terms, what it rules out is theories that seek to put a

notion of truth in place in advance of a notion of sense. (Frege's own theory does not

have this shape.) That is, it rules out attempts to explain what it is for a sign design to

---

[11] This argument is reminiscent of one Dummett offers against the availability of truth-conditional semantic theories to those endorsing redundancy theories of truth. I think there is something to the analogy, but I think the particular role assigned to the notion of anaphora makes this is a good argument, while I am not convinced that Dummett's is.

express a thought (that is, the sense of a declarative sentence) by appealing to a prior

notion of what it is for the sign design to stand in the right relation to things to be true.

The idea would then be to understand the sense, meaning, or content that the sign design

expresses in terms of the distinction between ways the world could be that would make it

true, and ways the world could be that would not make it true: its truth conditions. From

the point of view of such an explanatory project, a notion of truth (of a sign design) as

correspondence (to the world) counts as *robust* or *substantive* in case it can itself be

explained or otherwise put in place without appeal to a notion of (propositional) sense,

meaning, or content. Fregeans, by contrast, see the notions of truth and sense as two

sides of one coin—neither as explicable in advance of or without appeal to the other. The

anaphoric theory, I think leaves room for the possibility of an account that starts with a

notion of sense or content explicated without explicit appeal to a notion of truth (i.e.

without the use of truth locutions), to which the expressive power of truth locutions might

then be added by introducing suitable anaphoric mechanisms. I'll say a word or two

about that converse direction of explanation in closing below.

So does the anaphoric account of the expressive role distinctive of 'true' and its cognates

show the incoherence or impossibility of an order of semantic explanation that begins

with a robust notion of correspondence between linguistic sign designs and features of

the world? No. I think it may be possible to mount such arguments, perhaps by arguing

first that no such notion of correspondence or propositional representation can do without

a notion of facts or states of affairs on the worldly side of the relation, and then second

that no story can entitle itself to such a notion unless it appeals to the practices of using

expressions as sentences in the making of claims, and finally that such appeals are already tantamount to a theory of sense. But even if that were right, the anaphoric deepening and generalization of disquotational construals of the expressive role of 'true' could serve as nothing more than a preliminary softening up for such an argument. What such accounts *can* do is to undercut the motivation robust semantic explanatory appeals to notions of truth and truth conditions derive from the practice of *saying* what some particular expression means by specifying the conditions under which it would be true. By explaining the expressive role of 'true' as they do, such theories challenge the justification for identifying the property sign designs are taken to have in virtue of standing in a specified technical theoretical relation to the world as *truth*. Thinking that some property could be so identified is a mistake resulting from misunderstanding the grammar of the word 'true'—on a par with taking some object made available by one's theory to be what is referred to by the word 'something', or 'no-one'.

It is, according to the anaphoric account of the expressive role 'true', wrong (though tempting) to think that one can explain what propositional contentfulness is in general in terms of possession of truth conditions. So, I have been urging, deflationists ought to acknowledge the possibility of *expressing* semantic content truth-conditionally, while denying the possibility of *explaining* semantic content in general truth-conditionally. This result will be unpalatable insofar as one cannot see how else one might begin to think about contentfulness than in terms of truth conditions.[12] Indeed, I take it that one of the major sources of resistance to deflationary approaches to truth is precisely that they

rule out what has seemed to many as the only possible form of semantic explanation. If propositional contentfulness is not to be understood in terms of an antecedently explicable notion of truth conditions, how is it to be understood?

I think this question should be taken very seriously indeed. Anyone who endorses deflationary accounts of the use of 'true', such as the anaphoric one I have been sketching, or its cruder disquotational cousins, it seems to me, owes an answer to questions like: How do you propose to understand the content of the sentences that serve as anaphoric antecedents for prosentences (or result from applying operations of disquotation from quote names)? In addition, anyone subscribing to the specifically anaphoric approach owes a general account of anaphora and anaphoric chains (as the disquotationalist owes an account of disquotation in general). The challenge put by the dominance of truth conditional approaches to semantics is not adequately responded to simply by making the case for anaphoric or disquotational theories that underwrite global explanatory deflationism about truth. According to such theories, semantics—the study of cognitive or conceptual meaningfulness in general—is not best understood as the study of truth and truth conditions. But then, how *should* it be understood?

I think that there are a variety of promising avenues available for exploration in responding to this question. I have developed one of them in detail in *Making It Explicit*. There I understand propositional contentfulness in terms of *inferential* relations, specified without use of truth locutions. The contents of subsentential expressions are then

---

[12] Thus Boghossian, for instance, just *assumes* that content must be understood in terms of truth conditions [op. cit., p 173]. It should not be surprising that those who start from such a presupposition then

explained in terms of their role in specifically *substitutional* inferences. Anaphora is explained in terms of various sorts of *inheritance* of substitution-inferential potential. But that is all truly a story for another occasion, a story for which discussion of how to understand the use of 'true' can serve at best as an appetizer.

<div align="center">

Robert B. Brandom

University of Pittsburgh

</div>

---

find theories that take a deflationary attitude toward the explanatory use of 'true' insupportable.