# Deflationism, Pragmatism, and Metaphysics

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Self-proclaimed deflationary theories of truth come in many flavors; this may be *prima facie* surprising, given that deflationists insist that truth is not a substantive theoretical notion. Whatever else they are committed to, the common intuition binding deflationists about truth together is that there is 'nothing really to' the notion of truth. Or, to be one (but only one) step more precise: deflationists think that there is no systematic theoretical story to be told about a relationship between true sentences (or propositions, or utterances, or thoughts, depending on the flavor of the theory) and truth-makers.[2] Rather, truth is exhausted by disquotation: all there is to be said about the relationship between 'Snow is white' being true and snow being white is that 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. However trivial the instances of the T-schema are, cashing out the details of a deflationary theory of truth has proven non-trivial indeed.

In this paper we do not directly defend deflationism or develop a detailed deflationary theory, although it will be clear as we go that we have deflationary sympathies. Rather, we try to get precise about just what this motivating intuition comes to, philosophically, and what consequences it does and doesn't have for other parts of philosophy. A deflationist must hold that there are no non-trivial *semantic* facts about truth – no non-trivial systematic relationships between truth-bearers and truth-makers. There are, however, plenty of interesting things to say about the *pragmatics* and the *logical function* of truth-*talk*, as we will discuss. Failing to keep these

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[1] The order of the authors is alphabetical; both authors contributed equally to this paper.
[2] In saying that there is 'no systematic relationship between' truth-bearers and truth-makers, we are not thereby copping to the existence of truth-makers. We suspect that it most helpful to understand being a 'truth-maker' as a relational property, such that truth-makers will exist exactly insofar as there *is* a systematic relationship between them and truth-bearers – or in other words, just in case deflationism is wrong.

issues neatly separated has often caused deflationists to stray unwittingly from their core commitments, we claim.

We argue that deflationism is neither a thesis about the pragmatics of truth-talk, nor even, in the first instance, about metaphysics. Rather, it is in the first instance a claim about the explanatory role that the concept of truth and the truth-maker/truth-bearer relationship ought to play in philosophy and kindred disciplines – more specifically, the claim that there is no such role. We propose a strict criterion for what counts as a deflationary theory of truth[3] – a precisification of the idea that there is 'nothing to' the relationship between truth bearers and truth makers beyond the disquotational relationship captured in instantiations of the T-schema. We use our strict criterion to distinguish between deflationist and pragmatic theories of truth. We will also use it as a tool for sorting out the debate over deflationism and so-called 'non-factive discourse.' Despite various claims to the contrary, we argue that deflationist commitments are orthogonal to debates over the metaphysical status of domains of discourse such as ethics and theoretical science, whose factive *bona fides* have been called into question. The metaphysical consequences of deflationism are, we argue, quite minimal; we think that both sympathizers and detractors have taken deflationism as having more robust metaphysical consequences than it in fact has.

*The Essence of Deflationism*

We can divide the core commitments of the deflationist into their positive and their negative components. Most of our interest, in this paper, lies in the negative commitments and their consequences. We will flesh these out more below, but in essence, the core negative commitment is that the concept of truth, or of the property 'is true', does no explanatory work. There is nothing systematic or theoretically interesting to be said about the relationships

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[3] Henceforth just 'deflationism' unless otherwise noted.

between truth bearers and truth-makers, and there are, accordingly, no empirical facts that underwrite the truth of the various disquotational instances of the T-schema. The concept of truth adds nothing to the explanatory architecture of our philosophical theories. Sticking to this negative commitment will turn out to be harder than it looks. In particular, we will argue that two of the most common ways of fleshing out the central claim of the deflationist in fact betray this negative core. One approach is to define deflationism in terms of the metaphysical claim that there is 'no substantive truth property.' Another approach is to argue that deflationism is true because truth-talk is not straightforwardly descriptive but has some other pragmatic function. We think that a rigorous deflationism ought to reject both approaches as committing to more of a *systematic and substantive theory* of truth (be it metaphysical or pragmatic) than is seemly.

As for positive commitments: the deflationist insists that any instantiation of the T-schema that has the syntactic form "'S' is true if and only if S" is trivially true, as long as it is well-formed at all.[4] (Here, S just stands for any symbol string. The whole sentence is well-formed, of course, only if S is a declaratival sentence. It is not the job of the deflationist to detect declaratival sentences; this is a pragmatic and a grammatical question.) Fleshing out what this means is surprisingly non-trivial. Various self-avowed deflationists have taken the equivalence in question to be synonymy,[5] material equivalence, necessary material equivalence, or cognitive equivalence. Hartry Field says that "instances of the disquotation schema … will be more or less analytic."[6] But he is right to add 'more or less': analytic truths are true in virtue of their *meaning*, and as we will see, saying that an instance of the T-schema is true in virtue of its meaning is just

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[4] This universal claim might, depending on a host of considerations that fall outside of the scope of this paper, have to be qualified to accommodate the semantic paradoxes. We will have more to say about this in footnote 6.

[5] For reasons that will become clear, we think this version of the equivalence is especially problematic.

[6] Field, H. (1994), "Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse." *Philosophical Review* 103:3, 405-52, 405.

the sort of substantive semantic claim about truth that the deflationist must eschew. Hence the sense of necessity or triviality here is itself in need of filling out.

The deflationist does not wish to do away with 'is true' and its cognates altogether, despite their explanatory inertness, because they play extremely useful and by-now familiar *formal* functions that enable natural languages to have certain kinds of expressive power. Most famously, it allows *blind endorsements* via indirect discourse, in statements such as "What Rebecca said last night is true," and *infinite conjunctions* in a single finite phrase such as "Everything Christine says about paleontology is true"[7] or "Every theorem of Euclidean Geometry is true." These can be expressed in English only because of the availability of the truth predicate.

Furthermore, and as we will discuss in detail below, truth-talk serves rich and varied pragmatic functions and not merely logical functions. Regardless of what we think truth itself is, truth-talk is a deeply useful tool for social negotiations over endorsement, deference, and more. We can use truth-talk to mark that we are saying something unoriginal ("Paul's point P is true"), to distance ourselves from the significance of a point, ("P is true, and yet…"), to mark our enthusiastic support for someone else's point ("Hell yes, that's so true!"), to defer to authority ("I expect if the department chair said it, it's true."), to express passive-aggression ("I am an excellent driver!"; "It's true that you have not killed anyone."), and much more. In some cases we may be able to achieve the same or at least a similar performative effects with other, non-truth-involving locutions, but regardless, truth-talk is a powerful and flexible pragmatic tool. The deflationist can (and should) acknowledge the pragmatic versatility of truth talk while noting that all these uses are cut free from any particular commitments to a systematic or

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[7] The deflationist reads this as saying "If Christine said "Snow is white" then snow is white AND if Christine said "Green is the best color" then green is the best color AND…".

substantive theory of the nature of truth or its explanatory role in any sort of larger ontological

or semantic story.

So we need to understand the necessity of instances of the schema "'S' is true if and only

S" in a way that will leave unmysterious our ability to use truth-talk for various formal

expressive and pragmatic functions, while not offering a substantive theoretical account of the

relationship between the two sides of the biconditional, thereby retaining the core positive point

that there is 'nothing more to' truth than its disquotability. One convenient way to do this is by

treating the truth predicate as a logical constant whose use is capturable in formal inference

rules. We can define the truth predicate T in terms of its rules of introduction and elimination.

In fact these rules are extraordinarily simple:

**T-introduction: S ⊢ T('S')**
**T-elimination: T('S') ⊢ S**

Call the above the "bi-inferential" version of the T-Schema, and let us consider an acceptance of

these two rules to be a formalization of the positive commitment of the deflationist. In most

cases, the more familiar T-biconditionals ("'Snow is white' is true if and only if 'snow is white'")

will be trivial, logical consequences of the bi-inferential T-Schema. So when they apply, the T-

biconditionals turn out to be logical truths.[8] Note that, crucially, these are not *material* inference

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[8] Here, we are following Shane Steinert-Threlkeld, "Deflationism, Gaps, and Expressive Power" (unpublished manuscript, 2013). Alan Weir ("Ultramaximalist Minimalism!" (1996), *Analysis* 56:1, 10-22) also argues for taking the T-inferences as primitive rather than the T-biconditionals. Note that on this view, the T-biconditionals themselves come out as logical truths. They have the same status as sentences of the form "S is false if and only if S is not true", which are similarly constructed using negation introduction and elimination. All of this requires more qualifications that one could shake a stick at, and a great deal more could be said about these matters. We make a few remarks here.

First, Hartry Field's version of deflationism in "Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content" (*Mind* 103, 1994, 249-285) takes the essence of deflationism to be the primitive necessity of the T-biconditionals. He also interprets this necessity in terms of the "cognitive equivalence" of their two sides, in the sense that they are immediately inferentially interchangeable. This is clearly very close to our approach for the following reason: a deflationist will need to explain the behavior of the logical connectives in terms of patterns of inference anyhow, since she will not have more robust semantic resources for doing so. So to say that A follows from B by a rule of logic (and vice versa) is not that different than saying that A and B are cognitively equivalent, in this sense. Nevertheless, as will become

rules of the sort that an inferentialist about conceptual content might use to help define a

regular concept. If they were, they would be part of a substantive theory of truth. Rather, these

are merely formal and monotonic. Again, if S is substituted by something that is not being used

as a declarative sentence (or something that the rules of logic do not allow to be expressed) then

the rules will not apply, but this is true for modus ponens or conjunction elimination as well.

It is crucial, here, to note that our 'bi-inferential' version of disquotationalism is not

supposed to give us a *theory* of the *correct understanding* or the *essence* of truth. All we want to do

is capture the notational role that truth needs to be able to play in order to serve the logical

functions it serves, such as infinite conjunction, while maintaining the triviality of the instances

of the T-schema in which the token enclosed in quotation marks is notationally identical to the

token on the right side of the biconditional[9] -- that is, all sentences of the form, "'S' is true if and

clearer as we progress, we think that beginning with the bi-inferences offers some advantages when it comes to spelling out the type of necessity on the table.

Second, while the inferential relationships between the two sides of the biconditionals are *nearly* indefeasible and *usually* immediate, we need to make room for some exceptions. For one thing, as rules of substitution, the T-inferences do not apply inside certain contexts like quotation marks and attitude ascriptions. For another, we need to accommodate the semantic paradoxes. A person concerned with the semantic paradoxes will occasionally accept a defeater to the T-inferences if the sentence in question includes the truth predicate. Spelling out exactly what these defeaters ought to be is a matter of some complexity (!) and is not within the scope of our interests here. Roy Cook ("The T-Schema is not a Logical Truth", *Analysis* 72:2, 2012, 231-239) argues that the T-biconditionals cannot express logical truths on pain of contradiction. But such arguments rely on the assumption that ALL the T-biconditionals are logical truths, i.e. that the inference S from "S is true" and vice versa is completely indefeasible. We do not want to insist on this, even if we do not know, exactly, how to spell what the defeating conditions are or ought to be (although see Steinert-Threlked (ibid.) for one attempt). The deflationist is concerned only with properly formed T-biconditionals and it is not within her scope to determine the boundaries of this proper form, but instead to explore the kind of necessity the properly formed ones have and to insist that there is no more to a theory of truth than them. Finally, note that later in the paper we try to show that the deflationist does not have a special problem dealing with domains of discourse that philosophers deem 'non-factive', and here we have a special case of that issue: the question is whether the deflationist can make sense of sentences that are non-factive for logical reasons. We believe that she can by being sufficiently careful about what, exactly, the status of the T-biconditionals or bi-inferences amounts to. We also find it *prima facie* implausible that the cogency of deflationism, as a meta-methodological maxim of philosophy, linguistics, and psychology, will rise or fall on its ability to handle the action surrounding the semantic paradoxes, which provide, if not handled carefully, pyrotechnic rhetorical force applied to almost any philosophical position.

[9] Tarski gives examples of other sorts of purported instances of the T-schema, such as "The sentence constitute by three words, the first of which consists of the 19th, 14th, 15th, and 23th letters, the second of the 9th and 19th letters, and the third of the 23rd, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 5th letters of the English alphabet is true if

only if S." The deflationist can use whatever grammatical machinery works best to capture these expressive functions, as long as she doesn't confuse this machinery with the 'real' essence of truth. (And as we indicate in footnote 8, we may need to introduce various complexities and constraints to deal with semantic paradoxes or other fringe cases. On this account, as should be intuitively appealing, such complexities do not change a deflationist's *notion of truth* but only the formal constraints on its notational use.)

While deflationists can capture the relationship between the two sides of the T-schema in terms of formal inference rules, conversely, *inflationists* will treat this relationship as captured by *material* inference rules that tell us about *substantive, contingent* connections between 'S' being true and S. A paradigmatic inflationary spokesperson is Davidson. For him, the biconditionals are contingent mappings from metalanguage to object language:

> [The seeming triviality of "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white"] should
> not con us into thinking a theory any more correct that entails '"Snow is white" is true if
> and only if snow is white' than one that entails instead: '"Snow is white" is true if and
> only if grass is green', provided, of course, we are as sure as the truth of [the latter] as
> we are of that of its more celebrated predecessor.[10]

The point of this counterintuitive passage is that the T-sentences express contingent semantic facts - they provide a theory of meaning with 'empirical power' (ibid). "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" is true only because it happens that our metalanguage and object language correspond, so that the true *meaning* of 'Snow is white' *happens to be* that snow is white. But it could have been otherwise; we could have used "grass is green" to mean this. It is our substantive truth theory – for Davidson, a top-down interpretive semantic theory – that will

and only if snow is white." We think that Tarski himself is not univocal on the status of such sentences, but in any case, as will become clear below, we think that a deflationist must reject such sentences as instances of the T-schema that are parts of a materially adequate theory of truth, and indeed she must reject their precise accuracy altogether.

[10] Donald Davidson (1967), "Truth and Meaning." *Synthese* 17:1, 304-23, 311-12.

tell us whether a metalinguistic phrase maps onto the homophonic object language equivalent. It is only a matter of 'convenience', as Davidson puts it, when our metalanguage and object language are homophonic or homographic. In a similar spirit, Putnam writes,

> The property to which Tarski gives the name 'True-in-L' is a property that the sentence 'Snow is white' has in every possible world in which snow is white, including worlds in which what it means is that snow is green … A property that the sentence 'Snow is white' would have (as long as snow is white) *no matter how we might use or understand that sentence* isn't even doubtfully or dubiously 'close' to the property of truth.[11]

This picture only makes sense, however, if there are robust (as emphasized by Davidson) and contingent (as emphasized by Putnam) semantic facts about the contents of the two halves of the biconditional, which can then be compared. In turn, this will make any inferences from one side of the biconditional to the other into material, nonmonotonic inferences. The deflationist has none of this available to her. For her there is, by definition, nothing more to the semantics of "'S' is true" than disquotation.[12] The deflationist does not think interpret the T-biconditionals as involving an object language, a metalanguage, and a substantive translation between them, but rather as formalizing a notational convention within a single language.

We've claimed that we can capture the essence of deflationism by understanding disquotational T-biconditionals as necessary in virtue of their encoding formal inference rules. This is a different way into characterizing deflationism than via the absence of a 'truth property' or perhaps the absence of a 'substantive truth property.' Paul Boghossian, for example, asserts

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[11] H. Putnam (1988), *Representation and Reality*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 333 (our emphasis).
[12] *Pace* what Putnam says about him above, Tarski himself did not settle unequivocally whether the instances of his schema are to be taken as conceptual or contingent truths, thus leaving both notions open to us.

that the "basic deflationary thought" is that "truth is not a real property,"[13] and elsewhere that it "is characterized by the claim that there is no such thing as the property of truth"[14] Now of course, there is such a thing as a truth property. Some things (sentences, beliefs, utterances) are true and others are not, and the hence there is a property of belonging to the set of true things. So the weight of the point must be carried by the rejection of a 'substantive' or 'real' truth property. But in order to decide what this means and whether we believe it, we need an account of which properties count as 'substantive' or 'real' and which do not. It seems, however, that one should be able to take on deflationary commitments independent of any such metaphysical story.

Our account has the elegant side effect of earning a precise sense in which there is no substantive truth property as a straightforward consequence of deflationary commitments, rather than needing to attach itself to any separate initial metaphysical commitments. The strict deflationist earns for free the conclusion that there is no distinctive, independently comprehensible feature of the world named by 'is true.' For if there were such a thing, it would become a non-trivial question whether "'Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white" – that is, whether 'snow is white' has the distinctive property under question if and only if snow is white – and so on for any declarative substitute for 'snow is white.' For our strict deflationist, there is no distinctive property to look for because the sentence is formally and trivially true. But, we claim, this negative metaphysical conclusion is fallout from a deflationary commitment to the triviality of the T-sentences, rather than a definite metaphysical insight that *animates* deflationism.

Where we are so far, then, is this: we began with the idea that the *essence* of deflationism is that there are no substantive or systematic relationships picked out by 'is true', and likewise

[13] Paul Boghossian (1990), "The Status of Content." *Philosophical Review* 99 (2): 157-84, 162.
[14] Ibid., 161.

that truth itself plays no explanatory role in philosophy. We have made our way to the thought that this essence can be captured neatly by the insistence that the biconditionals encapsulate necessary, formal rules of inference as opposed to contingent, material rules of inference—and that these do all the work that truth needs to do: namely, adding to the expressive power of natural language. A direct consequence of this division is that whereas for the inflationist, the biconditionals capture translations between a metalanguage and an object language (which will often be homophonic), for the deflationist, the biconditionals are not translations at all: they are markers of notational variations, within a single language. They are not metalinguistic statements *about semantic facts* (for if they were, they would be contingent, and hence materially substantive, as Davidson points out).

If all this is correct, then we have sharpened our account of the essence of deflationism quite a bit. Deflationary truth is a merely formal notion falling directly out of the introduction and elimination rules for the truth predicate, which immediately yields that instances of "'S' is true if and only if S" are conceptually necessary. This notion will suffice to enable blind endorsement and semantic ascent, while involving no ontological or theoretical commitments beyond the biconditionals themselves. We now can see that our rather minimal starting point already yields the deflationist some fairly strong conclusions about the metaphysics of meaning.

First and perhaps most importantly, once we commit ourselves to strict deflationism about truth, deflationism about other semantic notions such as reference, meaning, satisfaction, and synonymy will come along for the ride. Semantic notions, as we would like to insist the term ought to be used, pertain to systematic relationships between language and the world that determine how language or thought 'hooks onto' the world. For the strict deflationist, the only direct correlates to semantic facts that exist are trivial, disquotational facts. There is nothing more to be said about why 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white than that this is

how disquotation works. The deflationist rejects any more robust explanatory relationship than this; there is nothing extra to say about what it is about 'Snow is white' that *makes it the case* that it is true if and only if snow is white – there are no 'aboutness' facts that are separate from disquotational trivialities or natural patterns of correlation. But once we give up any theoretically robust notion of 'is true' or the truth-bearer/truth-maker relationship, we also have no material for a properly semantic notion of reference or meaning either. There is nothing metalinguistic or substantive to be said about how 'my dog' is related to my dog, any more than there is about how 'Snow is white' is related to snow is white. Thus there is no non-trivial story to be told about how 'my dog' contributes to fixing the truth conditions of 'My dog is fuzzy', since there is no non-trivial story to be told about truth conditions at all. Nor, likewise, is there a story about why "My dog is fuzzy" *means* that my dog is fuzzy.

Let us slow down on that point for a moment. Why does deflationism about truth carry along with it deflationism about reference, and other such semantic 'aboutness' concepts? Remember, deflationism about truth, on our account, commits us to rejecting the contingency of "'S' is true iff S", for all S. Now imagine that there were inflationary, contingent facts about reference. Suppose it were a contingent fact that 'dogs' refers to dogs. But then it would become a contingent fact that "All dogs are fuzzy" is true if and only if all dogs are fuzzy. Similarly, if we had an inflationary notion of satisfaction – if it were a contingent fact that fuzzy things satisfy the predicate 'is fuzzy' – then it would likewise become contingent that "All dogs are fuzzy" is true if and only if all dogs are fuzzy. Likewise for an inflationary theory of meaning, according to which it is contingent that "All dogs are fuzzy" means all dogs are fuzzy. So once we insist on the triviality of the T-sentences, all of these notions deflate en masse. The deflationist, as a matter of methodological principle, rejects the assumption that there are

systematic truth-bearer/truth-maker relationships that are distinctively semantic, and this undercuts all inflationary semantic notions, not just truth.

We can, however, help ourselves to perfectly good *disquotational* correlates of reference and meaning and other traditionally semantic notions, which match our disquotational notion of truth: "'a' refers to a" will be necessary for any name substituted for a, as it precisely would not if this were an inflationary metalinguistic claim about a semantic fact. And 'refers to', like 'is true', can serve useful expressive functions in virtue of its logical structure: it enables us to say things like "Everything Einstein ever referred to in his writings on physics exists" or "I did not quite hear what you were referring to over lunch."[15] *Mutatis mutandis* for "'S' means that S", for any well-formed sentence S. Thus the deflationist has deflationary correlates of each of the standard semantic notions, and she rejects any appeal to substantive or informative semantic facts. The disquotational versions of traditional semantic notions give natural language expressive power through their logical functioning, and no more.

Once we see that deflationism about truth carries with it deflationism about all semantic notions, it becomes clear that a deflationist must altogether reject any robust notion of synonymy, and with it any notion of literal translation. To ask whether two expressions are synonymous is to ask whether they share the same meaning. But if meaning is a thoroughly disquotational notion, and meaning facts are trivial rather than contingent, then there is no more to be said about the meaning of 'S', for any given speaker, than that it is S. If Sarah says "A", and Joe says "B", then Sarah's utterance is true if and only if A (in Sarah's language, as she presently understands it), while Joe's utterance is true if and only if B (in Joe's language, as he presently understands it). There is no metalinguistic stance from within which we can ask whether "A"-for-Sarah means the same thing as "B"-for-Joe, because there is no non-trivial

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[15] See Robert Brandom, "Reference Explained Away" (*Journal of Philosophy* 81:9, 1984, 469-92), which does a nice job of defending and expanding upon this sort of deflationism about reference.

relationship between A and "'A' is true" or between B and "'B' is true" to be probed. For the deflationist, the biconditionals do not tell us distinct semantic facts about sentences that can then be compared. Synonymy, for a strict deflationist, can only mean idiolectical homophony. And without a robust notion of synonymy as literal, contingent sameness of meaning, there is no such thing as literal translation between languages.

Once we deflate synonymy and meaning, we can see that all correlates of semantic facts – that is, all facts about reference, truth, meaning, satisfaction, and so forth - are *idiolectical*. All they can do is keep track of the linguistic productions of a particular speaker. This is not to say that there are idiolects that have real, substantive meanings in some way that shared languages do not; rather, the point is that a properly deflationist semantics is nothing more than disquotation, and this must be the disquotation of *some speaker in particular*. All that "S" can mean, for a speaker at a time, is S, in the idiolect of that speaker at that time. For that matter, just as there is no such thing as interpersonal synonymy, there is no such thing as *intrapersonal* synonymy either: questions about whether I mean the same thing by "S" now as I did when I was ten (or as I did last week) rely just as thoroughly on an inflationary notion of 'real meanings' that can be compared from a metalinguistic stance as do more traditional translation questions. All we can say about meaning, strictly speaking, is that when someone says "S", that utterance means S in the current idiolect of the speaker.

This does not have any interesting kind of destabilizing effect on linguistic practice, however. Indeed, if the deflationist is right, then adding 'real meanings' into our conversations about our reasonably stable linguistic behavior would not have added anything explanatorily helpful anyhow. In general, over time, speakers are stable and consistent enough in their uses of various sounds to allow interpretable compositional grammar and the like. Sometimes, speakers use words non-standardly – in metaphors, codes, bursts of rhetorical excess, elliptical

comments, odd nonstandard contexts, and so forth. As long as we are not concerned with what the 'real meaning' is underneath this moderate variation, none of this is distressing. Our uses can be context-sensitive, holistically determined, governed only by fluid and defeasible rules, or what have you, and none of this has a semantic impact, as long as our linguistic behavior is stable enough for us to count as speakers at all.

For the strict deflationist, then, a sentence like "'Schnee ist weiss' is true iff snow is white" is not properly understood as an instance of the T-schema, and it is certainly not part of a materially adequate theory of truth. It is best understood, not as expressing a semantic fact at all, but as elliptical for a decent practical generalization about the usefulness, on the part of some speakers, of substituting 'Schnee ist weiss' for other speakers' use of 'Snow is white.' Since, in practice, the coordination of behavior based on this strategy will be good enough but imperfect,[16] the biconditional is not precisely or literally true.

The deflationist should treat questions about translation (and, should they come up, questions about intrapersonal discursive stability) as naturalistic and practical questions about the successful or unsuccessful coordination of behavior through communication, rather than as questions about semantic facts and synonymy relations. My "Snow is white" may be a pragmatically useful or 'good enough' translation of your "Schnee ist Weiss," but there is no objective fact of the matter about whether the former "means the same thing" as the latter. According to the deflationist, sentences express thoughts, and words express concepts. She can say that for Joe, "Rebecca's dog is fuzzy" expresses his thought that Rebecca's dog is fuzzy. But again, there is no separate metalinguistic stance we can adopt from which we can ask what real

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[16] The uses of these two sentences will be similar but not identical. For example, surely someone at some time has used "Snow is white" in some metaphorical way that no one has used "Schnee ist weiss". Closer to home, English-speaking philosophers almost certainly use "Snow is white" most often to remind one another about Tarski or about the triviality of truth-talk – a use that surely doesn't have an exact correlate in German speakers' use of "Schnee ist weiss"! Indeed, the most common uses of *both* the sentence 'Snow is white' and the sentence 'Schnee ist weiss' is probably to make points in English philosophy about truth.

semantic content *that* has and whether it is the same one that belongs to Sarah's (idiolectical) thought that Rebecca's dog is fuzzy. She can, though, perfectly well compare the role that these sentences play for Joe and for Sarah and note that these roles are similar – that Joe and Sarah will be inclined to manifest similar inferential behavior in light of them, that they will not get into conflicts when it comes to their coordinated interactions involving Rebecca's dog, and so forth. The deflationist can help herself to notions like computational role, causal indication relations, and patterns of public coordination involving linguistic behavior. And she has no problem with linguists learning to make empirical predictions about how people will act and talk given various sentence constructions. But she rejects that such explanations need to or should appeal to a layer of independent semantic facts that are shared between speakers and play a role in those explanations. We use language to coordinate exceptionally complicated behaviors. As long as our language uses are stable enough that we can respond productively and smoothly to one another's speech, including new combinations of words we haven't heard before – which we can, typically although not always – there is nothing more to know about whether we share meanings.

We can now see why it is misleading to capture the kind of necessity the biconditionals in terms of 'analytic truth' or, even worse, 'synonymy'. If synonymy can only be homophony within an idiolect, then the two sides of the biconditionals are not synonymous. And an analytic truth is one that is true *in virtue of its meaning*. For the strict deflationist, calling the instances of the T-schema analytic is uninformative at best, and misleading at worst, given that there are no non-trivial meaning facts. It is either telling us that, for all appropriate substitutions for S, "'S' is true if and only if S" because "'S' is true if and only if S" means that 'S' is true if and only if S, or it is appealing to some separate semantic fact about 'is true' that the deflationist should reject.

Attraction to deflationism typically stems from attraction to metaphysical parsimony and naturalistic explanations, so the eschewing of all inflationary semantic facts and notions that are in danger of not being naturalizable is a happy result for the standard deflationist. As we just saw, she need not stop talking about meaning, reference, and the like. She can just recognize that these are trivial, disquotational notions that will not do any explanatory work for her. She can also acknowledge that, in the vernacular of the "folk," what appear to be non-disquotational instances of words like meaning and reference do appear. But she will insist that, strictly speaking, they are serving as useful proxies for more pragmatic notions. If Sarah says "What Rebecca meant when she said 'Dogs have four legs' is that the typical dog has four legs," a deflationist must take her as having said that as (roughly) a proxy for "If, when she said 'Dogs have four legs,' Rebecca had been pressed to be more precise, she probably would have said something like 'The typical dog has four legs,' and she then would have taken herself to have said something with the pragmatic effect she had intended to achieve with her first utterance." Indeed, in everyday natural language, we use words like 'means' and in a wide variety of ways that don't map onto any clear commitments about the metaphysics of semantics ("I didn't mean it!", "What do you think she meant by doing that?", "What does this painting mean to you?", etc.).[17] The deflationist needn't be in the business of legislating everyday speech and has no problem with these various uses; she will presume that they can all be glossed as rough proxies for claims about language use that are not relying on robust semantic facts. When speaking strictly, however, the only non-proxy uses of words like meaning and reference the deflationist will countenance will be the disquotational ones: she can say that "dogs" refers to dogs, and the like.

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[17] Mark Lance catalogues some of these uses of 'means' and its cognates in "Navigating the worlds of which we are authors", unpublished mss.

*Deflationism and the Pragmatics of Truth-Talk*

We mentioned at the start that many theories of truth fly the deflationary flag, and that we are not convinced that all of them should properly be considered deflationist. In this section we'd like to dig into one genre of such theories. These are theories that form part of a more general attempt to portray pragmatics as more fundamental than semantics, by explaining the semantics of the truth predicate as in some way supervening upon the pragmatics of truth-talk. For instance, Sellars argues that truth-talk connects linguistic entities with the non-linguistic order, but that claims involving semantic vocabulary such as 'is true' and 'means' should not be understood as *descriptive* but as *performative*.[18] To say that 'P' is true, for Sellars, is to perform commitment to the legitimacy of certain inferences. Likewise, Robert Brandom argues that the act of calling something true is a specific sort of performance of endorsement rather than a description. The general idea here is that a theory of truth should not identify truth with a substantial property that can be predicated of sentences (or propositions or other possible truth-bearers); rather, it should explain the *pragmatic function of truth-talk*, which is taken to be something other than making straightforward declarative assertions that predicate truth of truth-bearers. The project is to give a systematic story of this pragmatics, and then explain the semantics of truth as reducible to or at least supervening on this pragmatics. All of these theories are some version of the claim that semantic notions can be reclaimed by being understood in terms of patterns of use. But we will argue that a theory that identifies 'true' or other semantic terms with specific patterns of use is still inflationary.

The most developed and well-known such program is prosententialism, especially as formulated in Grover, Camp, and Belnap's classic article, "A Prosententialist Theory of Truth."[19]

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[18] I.e. see Sellars (1962), "Truth and 'Correspondence.'" *Journal of Philosophy* 59:2. 29-56.
[19] Dorothy Grover, Joseph Camp, and Nuel Belnap (1975), "A Prosentential Theory of Truth." *Philosophical Studies* 27:2, 73-125. But see also Robert Brandom (2002), "Expressive vs. Explanatory Deflationism about Truth," in *What Is Truth?*, Richard Schantz (ed.), Berlin and New York: de Gruyter,

Prosententialists - roughly - think that truth should be understood by way of the anaphoric, 'anti-plagiarizing' function of truth attributions. Prosententialists take their theory of truth to be deflationary because they do not take truth to be a metaphysical property, and they do not offer an account of how language 'hooks onto the world' by way of a theory of the systematic relationships between truth-makers and truth-bearers. Instead, they identify our concept of truth itself with a particular (not straightforwardly descriptive) function that truth-talk plays.

We claim that any such pragmatic theory of this genre fails to be a deflationist theory. To preview the point: when we try to generate a semantics for truth discourse and a concept of truth out of a particular pragmatic function, we still commit ourselves to the idea that there is some discrete, systematic feature of sentences (i.e. that they can be used in a certain way) that makes them true. In turn, as we will see in more detail, truth ceases to be a purely disquotational notion, the biconditionals cease to be necessary, and truth takes on a distinctive explanatory role. In all these senses, the resulting theory of truth fails to be deflationary. Since, moreover, we do not identify the essence of deflationism with the denial of the existence of a 'substantive truth property' that hooks words to world, we likewise do not take it as a test of deflationist bona fides that a theory begin by assigning 'is true' something other than a traditional predicative role.

Grover, Camp and Belnap object to Ramsay's redundancy theory of truth on the grounds that it does not capture the pragmatics of truth-talk properly, thereby setting the stage for their move to taking the pragmatics of truth talk as constituting the basis for a theory of truth itself. When someone says "That's true" in response to "Snow is white," they argue, "it would be a mistake to think her speech-act amounts to nothing more than just saying 'snow is white' again … Truth talk acknowledges the presence of the antecedent. It's like repeating but

103-119, and Mark Lance (1997), "The Significance of Anaphoric Theories of Truth and Reference", *Philosophical Issues* 8, 181-198.

without plagiarizing" (1975, 110). Saying "That's true" serves to "grant someone's point" (Ibid., 94) and "acknowledges" an antecedent - they think that their prosentential theory of truth "gets the pragmatics right as the Ramsey translations do not" (Ibid., 101). On such grounds, Grover, Camp, and Belnap argue that the subject-predicate grammar of "'S' is true" sentences is misleading; 'is true' does not function as a predicate, but rather as a prosentence that stands in anaphorically for a previously asserted sentence, and thereby serves a citational or anti-plagiarizing function. That is, 'is true' functions like 'he' or 'it', except on sentences rather than objects; it does not introduce a new property into the conversation but serves to re-assert or re-endorse an already asserted or endorsed sentence. Its 'anti-plagiarizing' function comes from the fact that "'S' is true", or "that's true" when said after S, can pragmatically perform not only a commitment to S, but an acknowledgment that S has already been asserted. Grover, Camp and Belnap take pains to show how they can retain the blind endorsement and infinite conjunction functions of truth-talk once they take 'is true' as functioning not predicatively but prosententially.

The claim that the surface grammar of 'is true'-sentences is 'misleading' can be taken in either of two ways, only one of which is available to the deflationist. On the one hand, the deflationist can safely distinguish between 'surface' grammar and 'deep' grammar, in the sense that she can note that the use of some sentence is not what one would expect given its syntax: its performative force or its inferential role may be different from what its surface syntax might lead us to expect. For example, while the surface grammar of "It's chilly in here" makes the sentence look like a declarative, in fact it might function as an imperative to close the window. On the other hand, the deflationist cannot say that the surface grammar of a sentence misleads us as to its *real* meaning that is undergirded by a deep alternative syntax; this is rampant inflationism. More to the point, a deflationist cannot complain that 'is true'-sentences are not

*really* predicative because 'is true' does not denote a property, despite their surface grammar. This would be a robust semantic claim of just the sort the deflationist rejects; there can be no distinction between apparent and real semantics, for a deflationist, since all semantics is disquotational. Accordingly, the pragmatic facts cannot constitute semantic facts that are at odds with the apparent semantic facts indicated by the surface grammar; this makes sense only if you think that there is a non-trivial set of semantic facts constituted by the pragmatic facts – for example, that the real semantics of 'is true' sentences is anaphoric rather than predicative because of the citational function of truth talk.

A proper deflationist must distinguish carefully between the pragmatics of truth-talk and the 'nature' of truth. It is no criticism of a redundancy theory of truth[20] that the various speech acts that use the word 'true' and its cognates have a variety of interesting pragmatic functions beyond mere repetition. Indeed, once we start attending to the pragmatics of truth-talk, we notice it is much richer and more varied than the prosententialists make out – they have not 'captured the pragmatics' of truth-talk either. We perform speech acts involving truth-talk to defer to another's expertise, to focus attention on points of agreement and disagreement, to shift the topic of conversation, to acknowledge but bracket a point, and endlessly more. Grover, Camp, and Belnap's special interest in the 'anti-plagiarizing' function of truth talk, as opposed to its many other functions, seems to come from its being a kind of pragmatic analogue of semantic anaphora. The anti-plagiarizing function of truth-talk feels 'minimal' and as though it doesn't 'add anything' in something like the same way that anaphora does not 'add anything.'

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[20] The right deflationist's criticism of Ramsay's redundancy theory is that it is not unambiguously deflationary. Since the redundancy theory focuses on propositions, and propositions encapsulate truth conditions, the theory leaves open what one's theory of truth conditions actually is. In fact, Ramsey himself favored correspondence with reality as the correct answer to the question of what truth conditions propositions encapsulate. So Ramsey himself propounded an inflationary version of the redundancy theory. Indeed, most deflationists have little use for propositions, and should look skeptically on any theory of truth that takes them to be the primary truth bearers.

But this is merely an analogy; semantic anaphora on its own serves no anti-plagiarizing function, nor any other pragmatic function.

In fact, the prosententialist, in criticizing Ramsay for missing the 'anti-plagiarizing function' of truth-talk and bragging that he can capture it, makes clear that he does not take the two sides of an instantiated biconditional to be equivalent; if nothing else, "'S' is true" marks that S has already been asserted in a way that "S" does not. Notice that the prosententialist faces a choice. If he wishes to say that this anti-plagiarizing function is *part of the semantics of "is true"* then he is no longer a disquotationalist and cannot take the biconditionals as standardly true, not to mention necessarily true; the two sides become quite different from one another. If, as we think makes much more sense, he says that the anti-plagiarizing function is a pragmatic use of truth-talk but not a structural part of its semantics, then he no longer has an argument against Ramsay or a motivation for giving a prosentential 'theory of truth.'

The core point is this: If the prosententialist thinks that the pragmatic function of truth-talk is constitutive of its semantics, then its semantics is not merely disquotational; rather, the T-sentences become claims about social linguistic practices. But such practices are contingent, and any inferences we draw from them will be material inferences. If this is how we interpret the T-biconditionals, then are grounded in material rather than merely formal inference rules. For certainly it is *possible* to use 'is true' other than anaphorically, and, more generally, to use the sentence '"S" is true' differently than the sentence 'S.' Linguistic pragmatics is flexible indeed! Descriptions of the anaphoric and citational function of such talk are contentful empirical claims about its use. Hence the biconditional T-sentences are materially contingent for a prosententialist. But deflationism requires that we stick rigorously to the trivial necessity of the T-sentences.

Thus prosententialism is not deflationary if it is to be read as a theory that cashes out what 'is true' means or what 'truth' is in terms of a specific pragmatic story. If, on the other hand, prosententialists are not trying to build pragmatics into their truth theory, then there is no reason at all for them to restrict their attention to this minimal and spare pragmatic function; they are free to give as robust and rich a pragmatic story as they like, and the restriction of their attention to the re-asserting, citational use of truth-talk is a misleading rhetorical ploy. That this anaphoric function is reminiscent of disquotational semantics in its minimalism is not actually interesting, given that it is just one function among many, and given that reassertion and citation are not in fact just repetition (as Grover, Camp, and Belnap point out themselves).

As a general matter, one cannot hold that there are no robust semantic facts and simultaneously give a robust pragmatic theory of those facts. Any deflationist has to distinguish the pragmatics from the semantics of truth-talk, if only because, as we saw, a strict deflationist has to deny non-trivial semantic facts altogether, whereas denying that there are non-trivial pragmatic facts (including about truth-talk) is absurd. Likewise, if we try to turn our pragmatics of truth-talk into a theory of truth, the T-introduction and T-elimination rules will come out material rather than formal, and will lose their trivial status. This is a general point that is not specific to prosententialism: any pragmatic *theory* of truth will fail to be deflationist on these same grounds.

In order to understand the difference between our version of deflationism and the pragmatist approach to semantics we reject, it's helpful to compare deflationism with Brandomian inferential semantics. In some important respects, Brandom's inferentialism is similar in spirit to the version of deflationism we have described, and certainly Brandom considers himself broadly deflationist (and broadly prosententialist) about both truth and

reference.[21] Roughly, inferentialism says that material inferential rules of use – including social rules for keeping track of commitments and entitlements - fix the semantic content of bits of discourse. The inferential semanticist and the strict deflationist both understand "'Snow is white' is true" as an *inference license* that allows us to infer "Snow is white." But whereas the deflationist's inference rule here is monotonic and merely notational, in Brandom's prosentential version, the normative structure of this inference license is cashed out in terms of the anaphoric, "acknowledging" function of truth-talk, which in turn can only be understood as embedded in a set of social practices. Brandom clearly and explicitly takes himself to be giving an *account* of the semantic structure of various bits of language, prominently including truth-talk and reference-talk. His goal is to isolate specific pragmatic functions of pieces of language that can be modeled within his overall normative scorekeeping story, and then to explain the semantic content of those pieces in terms of those functions. In this way he gives accounts of the semantics of singular terms, propositional attitude ascriptions, and so forth, prominently including truth-talk and reference-talk. Thus for instance the term 'refers' is not to be understood as picking out a world-word relationship but rather as "a complex anaphoric pronoun-forming operator" (MIE 306). The account he gives is basically an elaborate refinement and extension of prosententialism, which allows him to say things such as: "'Snow is white is true' is read as a prosentence of laziness, having *the same* semantic content as its anaphoric antecedent, perhaps the token of 'snow is white' that it contains. The prosentence differs from its antecedent in *explicitly acknowledging* its dependence upon an antecedent" (MIE 302, our emphasis). Thus Brandom believes in a robust, non-disquotational notion of sameness of semantic content, which we have rejected.  He also believes that bits of language can be identified with *essential* pragmatic functions that have a special role in fixing semantics.

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[21] See R. Brandom (1998), *Making it Explicit*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (especially Chapter 6), and R. Brandom, "Reference Explained Away", op. cit.

Not only do we think such theories are inflationary despite their protests, but we also find the idea that there is an essential, systematic pragmatic function of truth-talk that can ground semantics to be far-fetched. Part of what attracts us to deflationism is a sense that beyond its purely logical, disquotational use, there is no systematic story to be told about patterns of truth-talk, which is, instead, deeply messy. We use the language of truth strategically and fluidly and in a wide and organic variety of ways. More generally, we suspect that the pragmatics of most bits of language take the form an unsystematic hodgepodge of uses. Deflationism is generally motivated by skepticism about a certain sort of reductionism. Typically directed at traditional, truth-conditional semantics, it is a skepticism that the about the reducibility of semantic notions such as truth and reference to notions that the naturalist will be inclined to accept (for example causal ones). But we see no reason to any more sanguine about the possibility of reducing semantic notions to neat pragmatic rules of use.

Prosententialists and other pragmatists flying the deflationary flag assume that we can sift through the messy uses of language and isolate the essential pragmatic functions that form the theoretical base for an account of semantic contents. But the strict deflationist will question the principled grounds for doing this. She will suspect that this sifting will, in the end, rely on what she will view as an illicit and question-begging assumption: it is only if you begin by assuming that there are non-trivial semantic facts and stable semantic contents that you will have any motive for insisting that some pragmatic uses of bits of language are the real, characteristic ones – namely, those that give us back something like traditional compositional, truth-conditional semantics. The impulse to privilege a single pragmatic function as the essence

of truth-talk seems to be a vestige of the inflationist's commitment to finding the essential core

of the concept of truth – a commitment we do not share.[22]

*Deflationism and the Metaphysics of Non-Factive Discourse*

We turn now to the debate over the purported tension between deflationary

commitments and commitments to 'non-factive' accounts of various domains of discourse:

scientific antirealism or ethical expressivism, for instance.[23] The broad argument for the *prima*

*facie* tension is that the deflationist doesn't have the conceptual resources to separate factive

from non-factive discourse. Boghossian writes, "A non-factualism about any subject matter

presupposes a conception of truth richer than the deflationary: it is committed to holding that

the predicate 'true' stands for some sort of real, language-independent property, eligibility for

which will not be certified solely by the fact that a sentence is declarative and significant" (1990,

165). Similarly, Field raises the concern that perhaps "the deflationist simply can't make sense of

the distinction between discourse that is fully fact stating and discourse that isn't"; "If one's

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[22] Consider our point about translation from the previous section: "Snow is white" is in fact probably most often used in the context of talking about truth, and not to describe snow, and hence it is not used the same way as "Schnee ist Weiss". Hence their *actual* roles in inference are quite different; we cannot use their inferential roles in order to isolate a shared semantic meaning between them. Now the inferentialist's impulse, we suspect, is to say that this is cheating, because the *essential* or *characteristic* roles do not include such marginal uses. But this is exactly the move we claim is deeply question-begging: this only counts an inferential role as essential to the extent that it tracks the traditional 'semantic content' the inferential semanticist is in fact trying to reconstruct from scratch out of use.

[23] See for instance Boghossian 1990 and Field 1994 ("Disquotational Truth and Nonfactive Discourse"). Boghossian concludes that deflationism should be rejected. Field gives a sophisticated account in which the tension is eventually explained away by way of a reconstruction of 'non-factive discourse'. Numerous other philosophers have explored the purported tension over the past twenty-plus years. See for example: Simon Blackburn (1993), *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, New York: Oxford University Press; Sergio Tenenbaum (1996), "Realists Without a Cause: Deflationary Theories of Truth and Ethical Realism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26:4, 561 - 589; Patricia Marino (2005), "Expressivism, Deflationism, and Correspondence," *The Journal of Moral Philosophy* 2:2, 171-91; Alex Burgess (2010), "How to Reconcile Deflationism and Nonfactualism", *Noûs* 44, 433–450.

only notion of truth is a disquotational one, how is one to convey what is 'not fully factual'

about the utterances?" (1994, 428, 433).[24]

The purported problem is this: anti-realists, expressivists and the like want to say that

some kinds of speech that have the surface grammar of assertions – ethical claims or claims

about unobservable entities, perhaps – are not 'regular' assertions. In inflationary terms, they do

not have normal truth conditions. But since the deflationist cannot appeal to truth conditions,

she cannot distinguish between 'normal' and 'abnormal' apparent assertions. According to

Boghossian, all that the deflationist can look to when deciding whether something is an

assertion is its surface grammar. Since a deflationist understands anything with the surface

grammar of an assertion disquotationally, she has no more to say about its relationship to the

world than that it asserts its content. Hence she has no resources to articulate positions such as

anti-realism and expressivism.

Why might someone want to claim that some domain of discourse is 'non-factive' - that,

appearances to the contrary, it is not made up of 'normal assertions'? Within an inflationary

context, there seem to be two kinds of reasons. One might think that the *speech acts* in that

domain have a *performative function* other than assertion (that they are actually emotional

exclamations or imperatives, perhaps). Or one might think that the *assertions* in that domain

have a *non-standard semantics* - that they do not literally correspond to the way the world is

(perhaps because they are useful fictions, or something of the sort).

We see both sorts of positions in metaethics, although they are not typically

distinguished carefully in the literature on truth. Prescriptivists are probably the clearest

example of the former. They argue that ethical utterances have a pragmatics other than that of

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[24] This is in some sense an ironic line of argument, given that in other parts of philosophy, centrally
including ethics, there is a tendency to *conflate* anti-realism with 'deflationism'. Ethicists often call a
metaethical position 'deflationist' just in case it is anti-realist. See, for instance, Jacob Ross (2006),
"Rejecting Ethical Deflationism," *Ethics* 116, 142-78, and the many examples he cites.

assertion - they are imperatives. In contrast, according to one strand of expressivism, ethical

claims express acceptance of a system of norms.[25] The two types of move are compatible with

one another and may well be mutually reinforcing; some emotivists, for example, "think moral

terms in grammatically assertive utterances function primarily to express emotion and perhaps

also to elicit similar emotions in others."[26] But they are, strictly speaking, conceptually

independent and importantly different.

Contrary to Boghossian's claim, deflationists have no special difficulties articulating the

claim that the pragmatics of a speech act is different from that of assertion, despite its surface

grammar, and hence not a candidate for insertion into the disquotational schema. It is no special

problem for the deflationist that "'Bring me a slab!' is true if and only if bring me a slab" is not

only not necessary, but in fact not even well-formed. But likewise, it is no problem if some

sentences that look, on paper, like they would be used as assertions are not used this way and

hence cannot be inserted into the disquotation schema. As we mentioned earlier, determining

which bits of language are appropriately inserted into the T-schema is a job for pragmatists, not

deflationists. Surface grammar is, of course, often a good clue as to performative force, but it is

by no means definitive - we can use "It's cold in here" as a request to turn up the heat, as a

password to gain entry to a members-only club, and so on. Typically we determine the

performative force of an utterance through a combination of content, context, and delivery: we

use a wide range of contextual and conventional cues, including local cues such as tone, gesture,

and situation, and more global cues such as the ritualistic history of a phrase. We are not

confused by the fact that the utterance "Simon says pat your head" is an order to pat your head,

and not an assertion about some guy named Simon. We can easily learn the performative force

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[25] See for example Alan Gibbard (1990), *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
[26] Mark van Roojen, (2012), "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2012 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/moral-cognitivism/>.

of phrases even when their apparent content bears little or no relationship to their functional role. In fact, we can often recognize warnings, questions, insults, imperatives, and so forth in languages we don't speak at all. Here clearly no appeal to truth conditions or other semantic notions is essential.

Thus insofar as assertion is a *pragmatic* category of speech act, the deflationist is just as able as the inflationist to point out that a particular utterance or utterance-type is not functioning as an assertion. Above, we argued that the pragmatist with deflationary aspirations cannot say that the surface grammar of a sentence is 'misleading' as to its *real semantics*, in virtue of its pragmatic function. But there is no reason a deflationist can't say that an utterance that looks like a pragmatic assertion in virtue of its surface grammar does not actually function as one. The deflationist needn't insist that from "Simon says pat your head" we are always and everywhere inclined to infer "'Simon says pat your head' is true."

We turn now to the second version of non-factivism: the idea that in some domains, assertions have a non-standard semantics – that they are not literally or straightforwardly true. This is the sort of non-factivism that goes along most naturally with 'anti-realism,' and it should be carefully distinguished from the kinds of pragmatic claims we just explored. Now clearly, the deflationist cannot accept such a move in those terms; since she doesn't believe in substantive semantic facts, she cannot say that some of those facts are non-standard, nor can she distinguish between literal and non-literal truth *per se*. She cannot distinguish between terms that *really* denote and those that do not, or between statements that correspond to facts—or the way the world is—and those that do not; these are semantic distinctions that she rejects. Thus when it comes to 'anti-realist' claims about domains such as values or unobservable entities - claims that undermine the 'normalcy' of some set of assertions by way of metaphysics rather than pragmatics - the deflationist will need to do some recasting of the debate.

But we need to take care not to set up the issue in a way that begs the question against the deflationist. Boghossian writes: "An irrealist conception of a given region of discourse is the view that no real properties answer to the central predicates of the region in question", and this "invariably" arises in light of a perceived "mismatch between an account of the meaning of the central predicates and a conception of the sorts of property the world may contain."[27] This frames the problem in semantic terms, and presumes that the metaphysician is in the business of giving "accounts of meaning" – a project that a strict deflationist rejects. As soon as one casts the realism/anti-realism issue as one about separating discourse that denotes from discourse that fails to denote, one sets up the problematic in a way that makes it seem as though one's theory of truth and reference is crucial to one's metaphysics – a move that is, one would expect, more tempting if you begin by defining deflationism as a substantive metaphysical theory.

A deflationist ought to deny this initial step. Metaphysical questions, for the strict deflationist, are not in the first instance semantic questions or questions about truth or reference. There is no reason to grant Boghossian's claim that first order debates are 'invariably' about a mismatch between meanings and reality. Indeed, this has little to do with how such questions are framed within science and ordinary language, where terms like 'meaning', 'truth conditions', and 'denotation' rarely come up. To assume that *underneath* first-order debates are implicit questions about whether objects correspond to meanings is to have already adopted a deeply inflationary stance.[28]

So how will the deflationist describe these debates? While she cannot do so by appealing to truth conditions, reference, or correspondence to facts, she has full access to observation

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[27] 1990, 157.

[28] One sees a corollary to this move in Arthur Fine's work, for instance. Fine insists that scientific realism includes, as one of its components, a correspondence theory of truth. He thinks that by rejecting an inflationary account of truth, one can "opt-out" of the realism/anti-realism debate. We deny this.

reports, along with reflections on how a sentence is used in inference, explanation, and prediction. Thus she can note that a type of claim is systematically unusual in terms of its ability to support counterfactuals, for instance. Instead of saying that unobservable entities in science are 'not real' or that their names 'do not denote', she can perhaps insist that the legitimate inferential role of a thought like "there are electrons in this computer" is quite different than the inferential role of a thought like "there are chickens on Mars," because the second supports an inference to "If I were on Mars, I might see a chicken", whereas the first does not support an inference to "If my sense organs were sensitive enough to see objects as small as electrons, I would see electrons in my computer."

Consider how a Gibbardian might give a deflationary version of her expressivism. Suppose that Joe says, "Caesar acted rationally when he crossed the Rubicon." The inflationary Gibbardian will insist that Joe is really expressing that he accepts a system of norms according to which Caesar's action is rational—that that's what Joe *really means*. Hence for the inflationary Gibbardian, Joe's statement is non-standard because its apparent semantics doesn't match its real semantics. The deflationary Gibbardian will instead focus on how Joe's assertion, as a public speech act, bears nonstandard ties to other thoughts and speech acts. For example, his assertion does not support the usual inferences to what others, who do not share his system of norms, are compelled to accept as rational. What she will not do is try to discern the implicit, real semantics of ethical claims.[29]

The point here is not to dwell on any specific story about counterfactuals, but rather that we can distinguish between different kinds of claims that play systematically different roles in inference. In other words, philosophers of science or metaethicists who are deflationists about

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[29] For example, the deflationist expressivist will cope with standard trouble spots such as ethical claims embedded in conditionals (the so-called 'Frege-Geach problem') by analyzing patterns of practical and theoretical inference, rather than by trying to develop a semantics that retains 'sameness of meaning' for embedded and non-embedded bits of discourse.

truth can engage in all the same first-order debates over metaphysical and empirical issues as anyone else can, using the standard roster of inferential techniques. What they cannot do is explain these debates in terms of truth conditions or questions about whether bits of discourse correspond to something 'real.'[30] The deflationist might well point out, to those who are concerned, that the fact that predicates of some sort or other do not refer is, even for the inflationist, not especially explanatorily helpful anyhow. Contrary to how Boghossian sets up the debate, the 'unreality' of a type of thing or the 'non-factive' character of a domain of discourse seems to be better understood as a *conclusion* that inflationists come to on the basis of an analysis of the proper inferential role of the concepts involved, rather than the explanation of that role. Once the deflationist understands how her inflationary, anti-realist counterpart reached those anti-realist conclusions, she has a fairly mechanical crank to turn for generating analogous claims in terms of patterns of inference, rather than in terms of semantics. Deflationists can do everything that matters, with respect to debates over 'non-factive' domains of discourse: they can occupy any of the standard first order positions, including those that are standardly understood as 'anti-realist' and those called 'realist', or 'factive' and 'non-factive'. Although a deflationist will have to use scare quotes when she identifies with 'realism' or 'anti-realism', her deflationary commitments with respect to truth are orthogonal to her metaphysical commitments.

Thus deflationism has metaphysical consequences only for semantic notions themselves. It can tell us that the word "values" refers to values only in a trivial, disquotational way, rather than by way of some substantive denotational relationship being named in a metalanguage. But it cannot, in and of itself, tell us anything about whether values are 'real.' The place of values in our best first-order metaphysical story is an independent question for meta-ethics, not for meta-

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[30] See Brandom 1984 for another version of this point.

semantics. Similarly, deflationism is orthogonal to questions about the pragmatics of truth-talk or other domains of talk. An uncompromising deflationism is not a pragmatic theory, nor in the first instance a metaphysical theory, and accordingly its consequences for pragmatics and for metaphysics are minimal.