

Davidsonian theories of meaning offer a way of moving from pure to extended disquotational truth which meets Field's standards for being (theoretically) deflationary.

The theorems of a Davidsonian theory of meaning also tell us something about meaning: they specify the meanings of the sentences of the target language by pairing them systematically with sentences antecedently understood. But they do not explain what meaning is: that is accomplished by the theory of interpretation, which explains what makes such a systematic pairing acceptable.

There is no circularity here: meaning explaining truth and truth explaining meaning. Rather, Davidsonian theories of meaning derive their power to tell us something about meaning and something about truth from the theory of interpretation, in which neither meaning nor truth figures as a primitive notion. Davidson thinks he explains meaning in terms of truth. But what he really does is illuminate both meaning and truth by appeal to interpretation, an activity that can itself be understood without extensive theoretical resources. This is why he can afford to be a deflationist. For someone like me, attracted to both a Davidsonian approach to meaning and a deflationary approach to truth, this is a welcome result.<sup>31</sup>

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# 15

## Deflationism, Meaning, and Truth-Conditions

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Over the last three decades, truth-condition theories have earned a central place in the study of linguistic meaning. But their honored position faces a threat from recent deflationism or minimalism about truth. It is thought that the appeal to truth-conditions in a theory of meaning is incompatible with deflationism about truth, and so the growing popularity of deflationism threatens truth-condition theories of meaning.

However, there is an argument that seems to show that a theory of meaning must involve truth-conditions. Crudely put, the argument is that, since a sentence's meaning plus worldly fact together determine the sentence's truth-value, meaning must at least in part be a truth-condition. If that argument—which we shall call the Determination Argument—is sound, then a deflationist who cannot have a truth-condition theory of meaning cannot have an adequate theory of meaning at all.

After a brief characterization of deflationism about truth, we spell out and explain a metaphysical version of the Determination Argument (section I). We then consider three possible deflationist objections to the Argument and rebut them (section II). In section III, we offer on the deflationist's behalf a deflationary reading of the Determination Argument, one which might allow deflationists to accept the letter of its conclusion but set it aside as trivial; but we argue that even so, the Argument supports a stronger, substantively anti-deflationist conclusion. In section IV, we consider an epistemic version of the Determination Argument and argue that it is equally successful against deflationism. We conclude that either deflationism about truth is false or the received

view that deflationism about truth is incompatible with a truth-conditional view of meaning must be rejected.

I

Deflationism about truth is marked by the claim that the locution 'is true' is a purely logical device, as opposed to a phrase naming a genuine, substantive property, such as those of being copper, or feline, or a heart, or a chair. When we say that a sentence is true, we are not identifying a particular characteristic of the sentence, one which it shares with all and only true sentences. We are doing something much less exciting. (Deflationists vary among themselves in precisely how they describe what it is we are doing instead.<sup>1</sup>) Most deflationists make central use of the schema

(T) "———" is true iff ——.

The schema (with its infinitely many instances, most notably "'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white") exhibits the disquotational feature of truth. A key claim made by such deflationists is that this feature exhausts the significance of the locution 'is true'—it captures all there is to capture about truth talk.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some deflationists grant that 'true' is linguistically a predicate even though they deny that truth is a property. For example Quine (1970) takes truth to be a device of semantic ascent, for although in applying the truth predicate we seem to speak of sentences, we in fact still speak of the world. Field (1994) grants that 'true' is a predicate but suggests that the content of "'Snow is white' is true" is identical to that of "Snow is white" and so does not attribute any property. In contrast, Horwich (1990) holds that 'true' is a predicate and that truth is a property; it is just that truth is neither a 'complex' nor a naturalistic property, and its nature is exhausted by its 'de-nominaliz[ing]' function (p. 5), the analogue for propositions of disquotations for sentences.

There are more radical breeds of deflationist. For instance Strawson (1949) maintains that although 'true' has the surface-grammatical form of a predicate, it is not a genuine predicate; rather, 'is true' has a performatory role—it is a means of confirming someone else's utterance. Brandom (1994, p. 283) holds that 'true' is not a predicate, but an anaphoric proform-forming operator; the paradigmatic use of 'true' is to construct a special kind of prosentence. For a rich development of the prosentential account, see Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975 and Grover 1992. Unless otherwise specified, our exposition will focus on versions of deflationism that take 'true' to be a predicate and make central use of the disquotation schema. However, we believe the main line of argument applies, with appropriate qualifications, to other versions as well.

<sup>2</sup> To wit: "Our theory of truth . . . is a collection of propositions—those expressed by instances of (E)  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff  $p$ , —and it implies (in conjunction with theories of other things) all the facts about truth" (Horwich 1990, pp. 37–38); "[W]hen we have pointed to certain formal features of the truth-predicate (notably its 'disquotational' feature) and explained why it is

There are several reasons why deflationism is thought to be incompatible with a truth-condition theory of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Here are two. First, if, as deflationists claim, truth is a flimsy notion, nothing more than a logical device, how can the notion of a condition of *truth* be assigned a significant role in any explanatory theory? Yet truth-condition theories of meaning maintain that the condition under which a sentence is true constitutes (at least part of) its meaning. Second, if, as deflationists claim, the truth predicate is just a convenient method of what Quine calls semantic ascent, so that speaking of the truth of a sentence,  $S$ , is just a way of saying something about the world, then the meaning of "S is true" is parasitic on the meaning of  $S$ . (Indeed, some deflationists claim that "S is true" means just:  $S$ .) But if so, it would be circular to offer the 'truth-condition' of  $S$  as part of the explanation of  $S$ 's meaning.<sup>4</sup>

We are not convinced—at least, we are not all convinced—by these reasons.<sup>5</sup> But we shall provisionally accept the claim that deflationism about truth is incompatible with a truth-conditional view of meaning, in order to see whether deflationism is threatened by the Determination Argument. We shall return to the incompatibility claim briefly in section III.

Once a deflationist has accepted that a truth-condition theory of meaning is unavailable to her, what alternatives are there? The deflationist could try replacing the central notion of truth-condition with verification- or assertibility-condition, or communicative intentions, or illocutionary force, or social conventions of use; she could adopt a conceptual role semantics, or an inferential role semantics. She may be heartened by the many respectable past attempts to develop such alternative theories. But many such traditional theorists have in one way or another appealed to truth and reference

useful to have a predicate like this (e.g., as a device for asserting infinite conjunctions), we have said just about everything there is to be said about truth" (Williams 1988, p. 424); "According to [disquotationalism] almost all there is to understand about the notion of truth is captured by certain trivial claims about language, like 'the sentence "snow is white" is true just in case snow is white'" (David 1994, p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> The *locus classicus* for this claim is Dummett 1959. The claim has gained almost universal acceptance, and there are a number of variations and developments of the reasons given by Dummett. Examples are found in Soames 1984, Etchemendy 1988, Horwich 1990, Brandom 1994, Rumfitt 1995, and Dummett forthcoming. Gupta 1993 has a subtle discussion of the issue. Soames (in press) abandons the incompatibility claim; see note 11 below.

<sup>4</sup> This circle has been thought to be very tight. Given an account of truth, a T-sentence could provide the meaning of the quoted sentence; or given an account of meaning, the T-sentence could provide a partial definition of truth. But the T-sentence cannot be used to solve for both meaning and truth—it is akin to a single equation with two unknowns (Horwich 1990, Chapter 5).

<sup>5</sup> For a critical discussion, see Horisk (unpublished).

in the course of explanation (for example, a verification-condition is a way of telling whether a sentence is true, and illocutionary theorists such as Austin invoked a truth-conditional notion of 'locutionary meaning'). The deflationist faces a harder task: her alternative theory of sentence meaning must explain all the significant elements of meaning without *any* appeal to truth-conditions.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that if what we earlier called the Determination Argument succeeds, the deflationist will not be able to do that. For that argument is intended to establish directly that a sentence's meaning is *at least* a truth-condition (whether or not other features such as force, or conceptual role, or conversational implicatures also deserve to be included as part of 'meaning').

A very compressed version of the Determination Argument is presented by David Lewis (1972):

In order to say what a meaning is, we may first ask what a meaning *does*, and then find something that does that.

A meaning for a sentence is something that determines the conditions under which the sentence is true or false. It determines the truth-value of the sentence in various possible states of affairs, at various times, at various places, for various speakers, and so on. (p. 22, italics in the original)

(Lewis makes it clear that the possible states of affairs that concern him are whole possible worlds.<sup>7</sup>)

Considered as a defense of truth-condition theories, this passage is sketchy. Indeed, it seems more a flat assertion than an argument, or at least to beg the question. But now look carefully at its concluding sentence, and note that that sentence does not simply presuppose its predecessor. We read the concluding sentence as freestanding and as the argument's main premise. Let us formulate a simpler version of it, ignoring the utterance-context features (times, places, and so forth) that Lewis mentions in attempting to accommodate indexical sentences:

(Det) A sentence's meaning taken together with a possible world determines the sentence's truth-value at that world.

<sup>6</sup> In a recent article, Charles Travis (1996) argues that features having to do precisely with ordinary uses of sentences require appealing to non-deflationary truth.

<sup>7</sup> "Contingent sentences depend for their truth value on facts about the world, and so are true at some possible worlds and false at others. A possible world corresponds to a possible totality of facts, determinate in all respects" (p. 24).

Lewis construes the idea of a meaning's determining a sentence's truth-value in set-theoretic terms, and concludes that a meaning is (in part<sup>8</sup>) a function from possible worlds to truth-values. The argument proceeds as follows.

- ∴ (2) A sentence-meaning is at least a function from possible worlds to truth-values.<sup>9</sup> [From (Det)]
- (3) Such a function is a truth-condition. [As conceived in intensional logic]
- ∴ (4) A sentence-meaning is at least a truth-condition. [2,3] QED

A few comments are in order. First, since we have ignored contextual features for simplicity, the Determination Argument as it stands does not accommodate sentences containing indexicals; and it seems to apply only to declarative sentences, ignoring imperatives, interrogatives and others. But these failings do not, we believe, affect the basic dispute between the deflationist and the truth-condition theorist, so we shall hereafter ignore them for convenience. Secondly, Lewis's conception of a truth-condition is of course that which derives from Carnapian intensional logic. Not all truth-condition theorists work within that format. In particular, some eschew the idea of a multiplicity of possible worlds. For example, Davidson (1965; 1967; 1973) exhibits a sentence's truth-condition merely as the right-hand side of the Tarski biconditional directed upon that sentence (for example "'Squash balls float' is true iff squash balls float"), the biconditional having been derived from a Tarskian truth theory for the containing language; and he tries to keep his treatment immaculately extensional. But the Davidsonian opponent of possible-world talk could still appeal to the epistemic version of the Determination Argument, to be considered in our final section.

Notice that even if one does choose to speak in terms of possible worlds, one need not accept Lewis's (1986) own radical metaphysical claim that, in addition to the actual world, there exist many equally concrete worlds

<sup>8</sup> Departing from Carnap (1947), whose sentence intensions were simply functions from worlds (or rather, their state-descriptions) to truth-values, Lewis follows Montague 1968 and Scott 1970 in treating his intensions as functions from 'indices' to truth-values, an index being an *n*-tuple containing not only a world but a number of contextual features such as speaker and time, in addition. This practice is criticized, effectively we believe, by Stalnaker (1972), who urges the two-stage determination process now associated with Kaplan (1979): The contextual features determine a Carnapian intension, and the latter intension given a world determines a truth-value.

<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, just a set of worlds, corresponding to the traditional notion of a proposition.

distinct from it. One can instead construct 'other possible worlds' out of what Lewis has called 'ersatz' materials such as actual propositions and properties. Or one could take 'possible-world' talk to be merely a vivid but dispensable rendering of counterfactual discourse.<sup>10</sup> However, for convenience, we shall continue to avail ourselves of Lewis's mode of speech.

Finally, we should emphasize that conclusion (4) is compatible with meaning's comprising *more than* truth-condition. We are to understand the Determination Argument as aiming to show that the meaning of a sentence must at least include its truth-condition, whatever else goes into it (such as illocutionary force). The Argument's conclusion (4) gives the lie only to the claim that sentences meanings do not include truth-conditions at all.

## II

As we said, deflationists (and some nondeflationists) have argued that deflationism about truth is incompatible with making essential use of the notion of truth-conditions in one's theory of meaning.<sup>11</sup> But then it seems that deflationists must somehow reject the Determination Argument, since the Argument purports to show that meaning *is* (at least in part) a truth-condition. To reject the Argument, a deflationist will either have to take issue with one or both of its two premises, or else reject one or both of its inferences. We shall now argue that it is very difficult to see how the deflationist could do any of those things.

On its face, the Determination Argument is starkly simple and seems compelling. Though nontrivial, the premise (Det) ("A sentence's meaning taken together with a possible world determines the sentence's truth-value at that world") seems nearly truistic. Let us consider the particular sentence "Snow is white" at a particular world, our own. According to (Det), given what the sentence says, namely that *snow is white*, and given the way our world is, specifically that in it snow *is* white, the sentence is determined to have the truth-value 'true'. In general, for any world, if the sentence "Snow is white"

<sup>10</sup> For an extensive critical review of options for the ontological parsing of possible-worlds talk, see Lycan 1994, Chapters 1–4.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one author, in a curious neologism, takes "the main idea behind deflationism" to be "that what plays a central role in meaning and content not include truth conditions" (Field 1994, p. 253). On the other hand, Scott Soames (in press) holds that the truth-condition theory of meaning is compatible with a deflationary theory of truth for propositions, but not compatible with a deflationary theory of truth for sentences. Sentence truth is to be defined in terms of propositional truth—a sentence is true iff it expresses a true proposition—where the expression relation is substantive.

means that snow is white, and snow is white in that world, then the sentence "Snow is white" will be true at that world.

But, now, if we raise the question, in what does the sentence's meaning that *snow is white* consist, the answer seems obvious: the meaning of "Snow is white" is (at least) whatever it is that will determine that sentence to be true in *any* world in which snow is white. (This is to follow Lewis's recommendation of discerning what meaning is by seeing what meaning does.) Hence, step (2) of the Determination Argument. Step (3) of the Argument ("A function from possible worlds to truth-values is a truth-condition") merely recapitulates a widely accepted definition of truth-conditions. And the Argument's main inference, from (2) and (3) to the conclusion (4), seems unexceptionable. Thus, if we agree that a sentence's meaning is (at least) that which determines its truth-value given worldly circumstances, and so is a function from possible worlds to truth-values, then, given that that is precisely what a truth-condition is, we must agree that a sentence's meaning is (at least) its truth-condition.

So it looks as though, if deflationists are to deny that a sentence's meaning is (even in part) its truth-condition, they will either have to deny that meaning does what (Det) says it does (namely, that it determines a sentence's truth-value given various nonlinguistic worldly circumstances) or reject the seemingly simple reasoning which leads from (Det) to (2). We now consider deflationist objections both to (Det) and to the inference from (Det) to (2).

### Objection 1

(Det) seems to present truth-value determination as a two-partner business, the two partners being meaning and fact. This could be taken to mean no more than that whether a sentence is true or false is a matter of what the sentence says as well as of how things are in the world, but it could also be taken in a more ambitious way:

We might think of (Det) as identifying a crucial ingredient in the mix which constitutes the sentence's substantive property of *being true*. In this way, truth would be a sort of composite property of a sentence, a property whose components are meaning and fact. But of course for the deflationist there is no such property. *Chez* the deflationist, there is no more to "Snow is white"'s being true than there is to snow's being white. In particular, there is no feature it shares with, say, "Grass is green," any more than snow's being white shares a feature with grass's being green. (To call a sentence true is no more than to assert its disquotation.) But then there can be nothing to the claim that the sentence's meaning (or for that matter that *anything*, including 'how things are in the relevant world') even partly 'determines' the sentence's truth.

*Reply:* The view of determination encapsulated in the more ambitious reading of (Det) is entirely otiose. To say, as (Det) does, that meaning and world together determine the sentence's truth-value is to say only that if the sentence means what it does and the world is the way it is, then necessarily the sentence is true/false. The Determination Argument itself does not require that meaning and fact be *components* or constituents of truth in any sense; nor does it in any other way require regarding truth as a substantive or 'chunky' property.

### Objection 2

(Det) tells us that a sentence's meaning taken together with a possible world determines the sentence's truth-value at that world. But what is it to determine a sentence's truth-value at a world? Determining a sentence's truth-value at a world is just determining whether a sentence is true at that world. So we might rewrite (Det) as follows:

(Det\*) A sentence's meaning taken together with a possible world determines *whether the sentence is true at that world*.

The revision is harmless. So, instantiating in (Det\*), we get:

(Det-s) The meaning of "Snow is white" taken together with a possible world determines whether "Snow is white" is true at that world.

But now recall the deflationist reading of 'is true'; the sentence "Snow is white" is true iff snow is white, and that is all there is to "Snow is white"'s being true. Substituting again,

(Det-s') The meaning of "Snow is white" taken together with a possible world determines whether snow is white at that world.<sup>12</sup>

(Det-s') seems false; for surely the meaning of "Snow is white" is irrelevant to whether snow is white at any given world.<sup>13</sup> But in that case, the Determination Argument is unsound.

<sup>12</sup> Note that this substitution could only be allowed if the biconditional is taken as necessary. With one possible exception (Quine 1970) contemporary deflationists do take the biconditional to be necessary.

<sup>13</sup> But see Field 1986, where disquotational truth is characterized by the equivalence of

C1 If we had used the word 'white' differently, 'grass is white' might have been true and

C2 If we had used the word 'white' differently, grass might have been white (p. 58).

*Reply:* Despite appearances, (Det-s') is not false but rather trivially or degenerately true. Even if meaning is irrelevant to whether snow is white, the possible world alone determines whether or not, in it, snow is white. Adding meaning as a further factor, as (Det-s') does, does not render (Det-s') false; even if the addition is redundant and superfluous, it is harmless. (Noting the superfluity, however, may lead to a further objection to the Determination Argument; see Objection 3 below.)

Given (Det)'s almost truistic flavor, it is not clear what other objections the deflationist can raise against it. It may be more promising to consider how the deflationist might accept (Det), but deny that it yields claim (2) as a consequence. We now turn to such an objection.

### Objection 3

The deflationist might argue that despite the nominal truth of (Det), meaning does not perform the substantive task the Lewisian says it does. The deflationist can claim that the work of determining truth-values is done without invoking meaning. If the deflationist were to succeed in showing this, then there would be no reason to think that truth-determination is something done by meaning and thus no reason to conclude that meaning is at least a truth-condition.

The idea is that although (in a sense) meaning and fact jointly determine a sentence's truth-value, this is for a trivial and degenerate reason, suggested in the reply to Objection 2 above: that truth-value is already determined by fact alone. Of the two so-called 'partners', meaning and fact, meaning is silent and fact does all the work. Since the sentence's meaning is not involved in the work of determination, then it is a mistake to conclude (2) (i.e., that a sentence's meaning is a function from possible worlds to truth-values) on the basis of (Det). Indeed, strictly speaking, there is nothing to determining a truth-value, so no 'job' for meaning to perform. Truth-value determination is an entirely trivial matter, and thus cannot constitute something 'meaning does'. Given the deflationist's picture of truth, these moves are relatively easy.

To determine a given sentence's truth-value is to settle whether the sentence is true or false. According to deflationism, there is nothing more to settling whether "Snow is white" or "Squash balls float" is true than settling whether snow is white, or squash balls float. For the deflationist, talk of truth-values cannot rest on taking truth to be a substantive feature of sentences—a genuine property "Snow is white" shares with "Grass is green" and "Copper conducts electricity." Correspondingly, the 'determining' of "Snow is white"'s truth-value by the fact of snow's being white should be seen as a trivial and inconsequential matter (though what determines whether snow is white may

be a matter of utmost importance). What settles whether a given sentence is true or false is simply the way the world is. This follows from taking seriously the idea that there is no more to truth than what the disquotation schema yields. Of a particular sentence, say "Squash balls float," the schema tells us that that sentence will be true at a given world just in case squash balls float there, false otherwise.<sup>14</sup> The buoyancy of squash balls does all the work in determining the truth value, and meaning does none. So, although we could say that fact and meaning 'together' determine truth-value, this has no more bite than saying that fact and word count (or fact and first letter, or fact and a handful of collard greens) together determine truth-value. Thus it would be a mistake to conclude from the nominal fact that meaning 'helps determine' truth-value that the meaning of a sentence has the distinctive and vital job of determining the sentence's truth-value at every possible world.<sup>15</sup>

*Reply:* It is indeed just the floating (or sinking) of squash balls that settles the truth of the sentence "Squash balls float," *so long as that sentence means what it does mean*, viz., that squash balls float. For suppose it did not; suppose that "Squash balls float" meant that chickens can fly. Then the floating or sinking of squash balls would hardly settle that sentence's truth-value. Meaning determines that it is the floating of squash balls (rather than the whiteness of snow or the conductivity of copper) that we need to establish in order to determine the truth of "Squash balls float." It is meaning that tells us what worldly condition is *relevant* to a sentence's truth. So meaning still does work.<sup>16</sup>

The disquotationalist might ask why the relevance spoken of here need involve meaning, given that the relevant worldly condition is already that which is expressed by the mere disquotation of the sentence's quote-name. The answer is that the disquotation schema yields an instance that is reliably correct only because the mentioned sentence in fact means what it does. Our reply can be further amplified. At least to the extent that the deflationist view makes some use of the disquotation schema

A) "———" is true iff ——, <sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Of course, in order to be able to determine *whether the condition* which settles the truth of "Squash balls float" *obtains or not* one would have to understand the sentence on the right-hand-side that specifies the relevant condition. But the condition specified itself says nothing about the meaning of the sentence "Squash balls float" at all; it talks only of the floating of squash balls.

<sup>15</sup> By the same token, (Det-s) above is, though true, only degenerately so.

<sup>16</sup> And its work is not just the trivial one of enabling us to understand the right-hand-side of the biconditional so as to be able to determine whether squash balls float (see above, footnote 14).

<sup>17</sup> In expounding their version of deflationism, the prosententialists Grover, Camp, and

deflationists must acknowledge the role of meaning in determining truth as it is utilized in the Determination Argument. Consider a particular instance of the schema, viz.:

"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white.

Clearly, snow's being white is not sufficient for the truth of "Snow is white." The sentence's truth depends not only the relevant way the world is (viz., on the whiteness of snow), but also on its meaning. In a world in which grass is green and "Snow is white" means what our English sentence "Grass is black" now means—i.e., that grass is black—then "Snow is white" would be false, not true, even as snow continued to be white. The schema would then have a false instance. But the problem is even worse: "Snow is white" may well be false *in our world*, since, absent a specification of what language this syntactic string belongs to, it may belong to a language in which it *actually* means that grass is black (or that copper conducts electricity, or whatever). If there is such a language, then the right-to-left conditional comes out false, and the disquotation schema has an actual false instance. What this illustrates is an unavoidable—and not merely counterfactual—dependence of truth on meaning. (Of course, that dependence is not to be charged against deflationism specially; it is just a fact to be accommodated by any theory of truth that purports to apply to sentences.)

To avoid false instances of the disquotation schema, one must recognize this dependence of truth on meaning. That means providing some guarantee that the candidate for disquotation has the right meaning. In fact, the need for such a guarantee is widely acknowledged among those who make philosophical use of the disquotational schema, deflationists included. The guarantee can be provided by stipulating (as did Tarski<sup>18</sup>) that the language of the mentioned sentence (the object language) be contained in or at least translated into the language employed in its disquotation (the metalanguage). One can add one or more indices to the truth-predicate (as does, for instance, Davidson<sup>19</sup>), or replace 'true' with 'true-in-English,' 'true-in-Hebrew,' and so on. Alternatively, one could restrict the application of the disquotational

Belnap (1975) do not appeal to the disquotational schema. But our present point applies to them even so: Whether or not one should attach 'is true' to the name of a sentence (where 'is true' is now conceived as a proform rather than a predicate) still depends on what the sentence is taken to mean.

<sup>18</sup> Tarski 1944, p. 350; the object language is part of the metalanguage.

<sup>19</sup> "[I]t is simplest just to view truth as a relation between a sentence, a person, and a time" (Davidson 1984, p. 34).



schema to entities whose meanings are held fixed. Thus, Horwich (1990) constrains the disquotation schema by requiring that the utterance under discussion is the same utterance as that used to articulate that utterance's truth-condition.<sup>20</sup> And Field (1994) takes it to apply to sentences of one's idiolect, where the meanings of the disquotable sentences can be presumed 'given' to the speaker.<sup>21</sup>

These various ways of ensuring that the disquotation schema does not yield false instances all result in artificial restrictions on the application of 'is true'. They are artificial because ordinarily we are prepared to speak of the truth of sentences that come from others' mouths; as well as sentences in other languages whose meanings are unknown to us, much less 'given' to us. We readily speak of truths without any overt reference to speakers, times, places, or even language. (We call nonlinguistic entities such as beliefs 'true', and we speak of unexpressed truths; we even allow that there may be truths that are not expressible in any language.<sup>22</sup>) We should note that, to the extent that substantial restrictions are needed on any acceptable use of the disquotation schema (whether in discussion of

<sup>20</sup> Horwich 1990, p. 105: "[T]he correct form of the disquotation schema is:

(D) This ('p') is true iff p,

where "This ('p')" refers to the instance of 'p' that occurs on the other side of the biconditional." E.g., "The immediately following instance of 'snow is white' is true iff snow is white." In contrast to Field (see next footnote), Horwich allows predicating truth of *all possible sentences* of any natural language.

<sup>21</sup> Field (1994, pp. 250, 255–56) refers to this restricted notion as "pure disquotation." (Pure disquotation takes the only legitimate candidates for disquotation – and thus *the only candidates of which truth can be properly predicated* – as items whose meaning is taken as given.) Field also recognizes other notions of disquotation that may be available to deflationists ('extended' and 'modified' disquotation). But he seems to think that these notions are parasitic on the more restricted, pure disquotation.

Note that this is not to deny that, for various purposes, we can individuate sentences purely syntactically. The point is that only sentences already paired up with interpretations (or, alternatively, propositions) are proper candidates for disquotation.

<sup>22</sup> Field's 'pure disquotation' results in a notion of truth that is, as he puts it 'use-independent'. It yields counterfactuals such as "Even if 'Snow is white' had been used in English the way 'Grass is red' is actually used, 'Snow is white' would still have been true"—surely an odd result. (Field 1994, p. 275). This result is a consequence of the fact that Field takes "'Snow is white' is true" to be 'cognitively equivalent' to "Snow is white." By this equivalence, the second part of the counterfactual is reduced to "Snow would have been white." And, of course, the whiteness of snow does not necessarily vary with (is independent of) counterfactual variation in use/meaning.

In light of the odd result, however, one might be strongly inclined to question Field's 'cognitive equivalence' thesis (which is also questionable on independent grounds). For a succinct discussion of Field's view, see Blackburn and Simmons (forthcoming, Introduction).

truth *or* in discussion of meaning), it becomes less plausible to suggest that our ordinary notion of truth can be exhausted by appealing to the disquotational features of 'is true.'<sup>23</sup>

What is more important for our present purposes, however, is to emphasize the motivation behind the various restrictions on disquotation. The reason we cannot make unqualified use of the disquotation schema, and the reason that in particular it is applied by deflationists only to items that come furnished with particular meanings, is that whether or not we can obtain a true instance of the schema will depend on the meaning of the candidate for disquotation. In other words, behind the restrictions lies the recognition that meaning is a factor, or as we may put it, an independent variable, that must be taken into account in speaking of a sentence's truth.

The upshot of restricting the disquotation schema so as to pay heed to the role played by meaning is that we can think of instances of the biconditional schema (in particular, of instances of its right-to-left direction: If \_\_\_\_\_, then "\_\_\_\_\_ is true) as holding *only once a particular meaning has been fixed* for the relevant sentence.<sup>24</sup> Taking "Snow is white" as our example again, we are to think of the right-to-left direction as follows:

B) *Given* that "Snow is white" means that snow is white, if snow is white, then "Snow is white" is true.  
Meaning  $\rightarrow$  (Fact  $\rightarrow$  Truth)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See above, footnote 2.

<sup>24</sup> Note that it would not be sufficient to restrict the schema to meaningful sentences, period. The restriction has to ensure that the candidate for disquotation has the *right* meaning. Whether or not a sentence will be true depends not only on its *having* a meaning, but on the *particular* meaning it has. But to recognize this is to recognize that *only given a sentence's particular meaning* can we turn to the world to yield a verdict on its truth-value. And we are arguing that recognizing this requires recognizing the sentence's meaning to be an independent variable affecting truth, and that that suffices for the minimal sense of determination used in (Det).

<sup>25</sup> Horwich (forthcoming, section 4) makes a similar proposal in connection with the deflationist schema for reference and being-true-of.

In a related discussion, Wright (1992, p. 213) proposes a formulation of the Tarskian biconditional which builds into it an explicit 'meaning condition':

(DTM) "Snow is white" is true if, and only if, (a) "Snow is white" means *that snow is white*; and (b) snow is white.

But (DTM) does not correctly represent the dependence of truth on meaning. For, the left-to-right conditional of (DTM) claims that that "Snow is white"'s meaning that snow is white is a necessary condition of "Snow is white"'s being true. Naively, this seems wrong. In a world in which "Snow is white" meant that grass is green, and grass were green, the sentence would still be true. At any rate, this left-to-right conditional is not part of the dependency claim; nor is it justified by it.

However, note that this rendering will turn out to be loosely equivalent to (Det-s). For, on a natural reading, what (Det) says concerning our particular sentence "Snow is white" is:

- C) *Given* that snow is white, if "Snow is white" means that snow is white, then "Snow is white" is true  
 Fact  $\rightarrow$  (Meaning  $\rightarrow$  Truth)

(B) and (C) both lay down the same two jointly sufficient conditions for a sentence's being true. The difference between them is largely a difference of emphasis. And either of them can serve as a first step toward a functional characterization of meaning. For, once we recognize meaning as an independent variable affecting truth, the road is open for us to present the meaning of a sentence *as that feature of it which, given the facts, yields a truth-value for the sentence*. According to the Determination Argument, this suffices for establishing meaning as being (at least) a truth-condition.

It may seem as though deflationists can avoid explicit recognition of the dependence of truth on meaning by insisting - as some deflationists indeed do<sup>26</sup>—that truth applies in the first instance to propositions, and only derivatively to sentences. It might be thought that the truth of propositions does not depend on their meanings in the way outlined above, since propositions do not have meanings; if anything, propositions *are* meanings. Suppose we accept this. Still, if we are to allow speaking of sentences as also being true or false, we must rely on the notion of a sentence *expressing* one proposition rather than another. A sentence will be true just in case the proposition it expresses is true.<sup>27</sup> But what proposition a sentence expresses clearly depends on (or just is) what the sentence means. This if anything underscores the dependence of truth on meaning.

### III

Our interest in the Lewisian Determination Argument stemmed from the fact that it purports to establish the truth-conditional view of meaning. If, as we have accepted for the sake of discussion, this view of meaning is incompatible with deflationism about truth, then so much the worse for deflationism. But perhaps deflationists could accept the Argument as it stands without compromising their view, because perhaps (appearances to the contrary) the Argument's conclusion is too weak by itself to establish the full-blooded

<sup>26</sup> See above, footnote 20.

<sup>27</sup> Recall Soames (see above, footnote 11). And see Quine 1970, Chapter 1.

truth-condition theory. We will now consider this new deflationist response to the Determination Argument.

#### Objection 4

A truth-condition theory of meaning, as we have liberally construed it here, maintains that sentence meanings are *at least* truth-conditions. On the present deflationist objection, however, the sense in which the Determination Argument establishes that meanings are (in part) truth-conditions is too weak and trivial to establish the truth-conditional view of meaning. This is because accepting the Argument is consistent with holding that what accounts for a sentence's having the meaning that it does is something other than its truth-condition. To establish the truth-conditional view of meaning in the full-blooded sense we mentioned, one needs to show more than that all meaningful sentences are in fact associated with, or *have* truth-conditions. One has to show that truth-conditions are what (partly) *explain* what it is for a sentence to have its meaning. It might be argued that only showing this would require assigning truth an explanatory role in one's account of meaning, thereby threatening deflationism about truth. If the Determination Argument is insufficient to establish the explanatory claim about truth-conditions, then deflationists could accept the Argument without compromising their position. And by the same token, proponents of the truth-conditional view of meaning would have to go beyond the Determination Argument to support that view.

To understand the present objection, we need to pinpoint the sense in which the Determination Argument (partially) identifies meanings as truth-conditions. The identification rests entirely on the observation that a sentence's meaning is sufficient for determining its truth-value, given the facts. In our reply to Objection 3, we pointed out that the deflationist must acknowledge the sufficiency claim, and, in addition, must also recognize meaning as an independent factor in determining truth-values. But the deflationist might argue that this still falls short of taking truth-conditions to carry the burden of *explaining* meaning.

The trick of the Determination Argument is to move from the sufficiency claim to a functional characterization of meaning: a sentence's meaning is presented as (at least) 'a function from possible worlds to truth-values'. (This is what enables us to identify a 'job' for meaning to perform which can allegedly be performed only by its truth-conditions.) But the deflationist will insist that the functional characterization amounts to very little. On the deflationist's understanding, a function from *anything* to truth-values is bound to be a very uninteresting function. To say that a sentence's meaning is 'a function from possible worlds to truth-values' is just to say that, given a sentence's meaning, we are in a position to set up a mapping from possible worlds to



truth-values for that sentence. But the deflationist will note that all the mapping amounts to is a (very long) list of possible-world-truth-value pairs. There is nothing holding the function's values together—no intensional basis for the various pairings of possible worlds with truth-values (in contrast, for instance, with the results of applying the mathematical function  $x^2$ ). Thus, talk of meaning being a certain kind of 'function', and subsequent talk of its being (in part) a 'truth-condition', does not point to anything of interest that enables us to understand how "Snow is white," "Grass is green," "Squash balls float," and the rest get their meanings in the first place. Thus, the deflationist might accept that, in the weak sense spelled out above, sentences' meanings are 'in part truth-conditions'. However, the notion of truth-condition invoked by the Determination Argument will now be seen to rest on nothing that deserves to be described as a functional role played by meaning. It cannot be assigned a substantive explanatory role in the theory of meaning.

The present objection is, then, that the Determination Argument is insufficient to establish the full-blooded truth-conditional view of meaning. So deflationists can embrace just the Argument's actual conclusion, the bare association of truth-conditions with sentences, without fear of compromising their deflationism about truth.<sup>28</sup> Understood in the above, deflationary way, the Argument does not give the lie to deflationism by finding an interesting explanatory role for truth to play (over and above its logical role as a device for disquotatation, generalization, forming infinite conjunctions/disjunctions, and so on).

The deflationary move can be pressed further. Consider that, for the deflationist, there are worldly conditions, such as the whiteness of snow and so forth, and there are meaningful sentences such as "Snow is white." Once the meaning of a sentence is given, then, given the worldly facts, no more is needed to determine whether it is true or false. We have seen that the deflationist must also concede that the whiteness of snow does not suffice for calling "Snow is white" true; the sentence's meaning also has to be taken into account. But, for all that, the deflationist might still insist that the explanation of meaning can proceed without appeal to the notion of truth-conditions.

Thus, suppose, as deflationists maintain (and contrary to the truth-condition theory), meanings could be explained by features that have nothing whatsoever to do with truth. Perhaps meaning is a matter of a sentence's conceptual or inferential role; perhaps it is a matter of the sentence's proper social use. There is no intensional semantic rule that is associated with the sentence and that yields a classification of all worldly conditions into those that would

<sup>28</sup> See Field (1994, pp. 250–52), where he suggests that deflationism can admit talk of truth-conditions.

'make' the sentence true and those that would 'make' it false. The deflationist might hold that, *however* a sentence's having its particular meaning is explained, its truth-value will be determined jointly by its meaning and worldly circumstances. Whatever the meaning of "Snow is white" consists in, given what it now means in my mouth, and given snow's whiteness, the sentence comes out true (nothing else matters). But for all that, the condition which would make the sentence true need not (even in part) explain its meaning. That it has the particular meaning it has suffices to determine whether it is true or not, given how things are in the world. But that does not mean that the way things are in the world—the conditions which settle whether it is true or not (given what it means)—are part of what makes it have the meaning that it has. A meaningful sentence will *eo ipso* have associated with it a truth-condition. But that does not mean its truth-condition helps explain its having the meaning it has.<sup>29</sup>

The Determination Argument was designed to establish the truth-conditional view of meaning. We are now faced with the claim that it does not have the power to do so. For, according to the deflationist objection just expounded, the Argument can be accepted by someone who holds that sentence meanings have nothing to do with truth-conditions. Though as a matter of fact, meaningful sentences will *have* truth-conditions (understood as above), their meanings are to be explained by features other than truth-conditions.

*Reply:* A truth-condition theorist, it seems, should accept the burden of showing truth-conditions to play an explanatory role in her account. After all, why would one hold a truth-conditional theory of meaning unless one thought that truth-conditions explain certain facts about meaning? Indeed, truth-conditional theorists often defend their view by arguing independently that only the notion of truth-conditions can help us explain such obtrusive semantic features of natural-language sentences as entailment, synonymy, ambiguity, and anomalousness.<sup>30</sup> But the challenge of Objection 4 is to show that the Determination Argument itself supports the explanatory claim.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Brandom (1994, p. 329): "One can say of anything that has a propositional content that it has truth conditions. According to the relaxed deflationary view, this is just a harmless compliment paid to things whose contents can be expressed in declarative sentences or by the corresponding 'that' clauses (. . .). But it is one thing to say that whatever is contentful will, in consequence, have truth conditions. It is quite another to think that one could use the possession of truth conditions as part of an *explanation* of propositional contentfulness. As Dummett recognized, this latter strategy is forbidden to deflationists, on grounds of circularity. Deflationists ought to acknowledge the general possibility of *expressing* semantic content truth-conditionally, while denying the possibility of explaining semantic content truth-conditionally."

<sup>30</sup> For a summary of such arguments, see Lycan 1984.

The best response to this challenge, we think, is to point out that the Determination Argument itself highlights an insistent explanandum, viz., the undeniable fact that the meaning of a sentence partially determines the sentence's truth-value. However deflatedly one might understand that fact, we can argue that the fact can be explained only by identifying a sentence's truth-condition as partially constituting its meaning. For, if truth-conditions played no part in explaining the meanings of sentences, then it would become a mystery why meanings should play the role they play in determining truth-values.

Accept, with the deflationist, that all there is to the truth of "Snow is white" is snow's whiteness. Still, as pointed out in the reply to Objection 3, the deflationist must concede that snow's whiteness will settle whether "Snow is white" is true only provided the sentence is taken as having the right meaning. Now, to reject the claim that meaning is explained by truth-conditions is to deny that the sentence's condition of truth—that is, snow's being white—is part of what gives "Snow is white" the 'right' meaning. But we may reasonably wonder how, if this is so, it is snow's whiteness, rather than the conductivity of copper or the greenness of Brussels sprouts, that is relevant to the truth of "Snow is white." If truth-conditions do not explain meaning, what makes one worldly condition rather than another relevant to the truth of a given sentence? Why is it that the color of snow will settle the truth in this case?

Notice that to ask this is not to presuppose, question-beggingly, that there is anything of substance to the idea of truth or of settling the truth of a given sentence. Perhaps there is, as the deflationist maintains, nothing more to 'Snow is white's' being true than there is to snow's being white. Still, since it is undeniable that snow's being white suffices for the truth of that sentence only given what it means, we are justified in wondering how it is that what it means allows *snow's whiteness* to be sufficient for its truth.

Indeed, a stronger claim can be made. In expounding Objection 4, we speculated on the deflationist's behalf that meaning could 'determine' truth-value in a weak, unexplanatory sense, even if meaning were to be explained by features that have nothing to do with truth, such as conceptual role, social use, or the like. But this is far from obvious. For the features invoked by competing theories of meaning *do not* normally determine truth-value even when combined with fact. Take conceptual role, for instance. And consider the familiar Twin-Earth examples.<sup>31</sup> Even given a world complete with its distribution of H<sub>2</sub>O and/or XYZ, the conceptual role of the English sentence "Volleyball players drink a lot of water" (as usually conceived) will *not* determine a truth-value for that sentence at that world, because conceptual role does not distinguish water as H<sub>2</sub>O from mere 'water' as XYZ. Or consider

<sup>31</sup> This argument is made more elaborately in Chapter 10 of Lycan 1984.

New Earth, which is molecule-for-molecule like Earth except for having popped into existence five minutes ago.<sup>32</sup> The English sentence "Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant were the greatest philosophers ever" would be false or truth-valueless if uttered by a New Earthling, even though its conceptual role is the same as it is here on Earth.

(In making these Putnamian appeals to parallel planets, we have tacitly assumed that conceptual roles are narrow, and shared between Earth, Twin Earth and New Earth, despite the sentences' different truth-values on those planets. Someone might instead devise a wide version of conceptual role, according to which 'water', 'Aristotle', and the rest make different contributions to the sentence's conceptual role in virtue of their referential differences, despite the sameness of their narrow components.<sup>33</sup> But then the burden of proof would be on such a theorist to show that reference and truth-conditions had not been tacitly reintroduced as a key component of meaning. Indeed, unless they had been reintroduced, meaning would fail to determine truth-value given fact.<sup>34</sup>)

Thus, a deflationist who maintains that the Determination Argument does not establish the truth-conditional view of meaning incurs a serious explanatory debt. She must show how features that constitute meaning on her preferred view can determine truth-value given fact, but *without* at least tacitly containing a truth-condition. Unless deflationists can show how meaning's ability to determine truth does not require appeal to truth-conditions, any version of deflationism that denies the explanatory role assigned to truth-conditions by the Determination Argument will turn out to be false.

In section I above we mentioned two ostensible reasons for taking deflationism to be incompatible with the truth-conditional view of meaning. One

<sup>32</sup> See Stich 1978.

<sup>33</sup> Harman (1987) does exactly that.

<sup>34</sup> Field (1994) agrees that conceptual role is not enough for meaning—it is 'individualist' and 'internalist,' and a plausible theory of meaning (and mental content) must have in addition both 'externalist' and 'social' aspects. Field proposes that deflationists can avail themselves of, for instance, 'indication relations' in addition to conceptual role, where indication relations are a matter of reliable correlation between people's belief states and states of the world. For instance, I am a good barometer of whether or not rain is falling on my head, and when rain is falling on my head, I believe that it is (p. 254). However, in the sense intended by Field (cf. p. 255), if an Earthling is transported unbeknownst to Twin Earth, her belief that water drops are falling on her head will be reliably correlated with the presence of XYZ drops rather than water drops. Nonetheless, the Earthling's belief will be false. And its being false is a function of its content (of the fact that the belief has the content that water drops are falling on her head). Thus, even adding indication relations will be insufficient to account for the present explanandum, the fact that meaning (content) determines truth-value given fact.

For a further argument that conceptual role, at least if conceived as an assertibility condition, is insufficient to determine truth-value given fact, see Brandom 1976.

of these reasons is that assigning an explanatory role to truth-conditions is thought to be incompatible with being deflationist about truth. If this is so, then the Determination Argument will have serious consequences for deflationism. To the extent that it serves to isolate a feature of meaning that can only be explained by invoking truth-conditions, the Argument will show deflationism to be false.

The second reason for the incompatibility claim was that insofar as deflationary truth is explained in terms of a sentence's antecedent meaning, any explication of meaning in terms of truth must be circular. Now *if* as we have argued, a sentence's truth-condition actually plays an important role in explaining the sentence's meaning, the latter conclusion must be mistaken; it could hardly be the case that truth-condition theories of meaning are hopelessly circular. So we can conclude *a priori* (at least without examining the circularity argument here) that the argument must be unsound. Or, at any rate, if there is indeed a way of showing the incompatibility claim to be true, despite the fact that truth-conditions help explain meaning, then—again—deflationism must be false.

#### IV

The dispute between the truth-conditionalist about meaning and the deflationist about truth as we have presented it can be cast in terms that at least some theorists of meaning may find more congenial. For convenience, we presented Lewis's Determination Argument in metaphysical terms, as involving claims about what the meaning of a sentence 'does' and what meaning consists in. But on a plausible (and widely accepted) conception, the primary role of a theory of meaning is to account for linguistic understanding; what it assigns as meanings of sentences must be what speakers can be said to know, or grasp, when they understand the sentences. Knowledge of meaning is the primary notion, the meaning of a sentence only a derivative one.<sup>35</sup> Fortunately, the Determination Argument has an epistemological variant, given by Field (1977) and Lycan (1984). The E-Determination Argument says:

(E-Det) If you know a sentence's meaning and you are omniscient as regards nonlinguistic fact, then you know the sentence's truth-value.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For critical examination of the relevance of this claim to the truth-conditional view of meaning, see Bar-On 1996.

<sup>36</sup> If we were simply to delete the word 'nonlinguistic' from (E-Det), the resulting premise would be trivially true and too weak to support (E2): So long as 'fact' includes linguistic fact,

- ∴ (E2) Knowing a sentence's meaning is *at least* knowing enough to assign the sentence a truth-value given omniscience about non-linguistic facts. [E-Det]
- (E3) To know enough to assign the sentence a truth-value given omniscience about nonlinguistic facts is to know a truth-condition.
- ∴ (E4) Knowing a meaning is at least knowing a truth-condition. [E2, E3]

This argument does not aim to assign truth-conditions an explanatory role in the account of meaning by showing that only truth-conditions can do what meaning does, but rather by offering truth-conditions as an essential part of what one knows in knowing meaning.

(E-Det) lays down two jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge of truth-value. The deflationist must be able to acknowledge these conditions and accept (E-Det), even if she insists on a deflationary understanding of the phrase 'knowing a sentence's truth-value'. There may be no more to knowing that "Snow is white" is true than there is to knowing that snow is white, *provided* that one knows what "Snow is white" means. If you know that snow is white, and you know that "Snow is white" means that *snow is white*, then you do (or can immediately) know that "Snow is white" is true. Also, as before, omniscience regarding nonlinguistic facts cannot, on its own, suffice for knowledge of truth-values; it needs to be coupled with knowledge of meaning.<sup>37</sup> (E2) seems to follow straightforwardly.

(E3), however, might give one pause. Unlike its metaphysical analogue (that is, (3) in the Determination Argument, which reads, "A function from possible worlds to truth-values is a truth-condition"), (E3) does not seem to be a matter of standard definition. Why should we accept that knowing enough to assign a sentence a truth-value given omniscience about facts amounts to knowing a truth-condition for the sentence? Answer: Because to know enough to assign, for example, "Snow is white" a truth-value given

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of course an omniscient being knows all sentences' meanings along with all the nonlinguistic facts. One of the facts that an omniscient being would know is that the sentence "Squash balls float" means that squash balls float, and another is that sentence's truth-value; so of course the omniscient being can 'assign' the sentence a truth-value. Thanks to Michael Smith for this observation.

<sup>37</sup> Of course, this is not to say that necessarily, to know whether any given sentence is true you have to know its meaning—for you might have it on good authority that certain sentences in a language you do not understand are true. You can know that "La neige est blanche" is true without knowing what it means. But you could not know that if no one knew what that sentence meant.

complete knowledge of the facts is to know no less than the T-sentence “‘Snow is white’ is true iff snow is white.” It is that knowledge that allows us to infer that “Snow is white” is indeed true, given what we know about the facts.

The deflationist might argue that knowing the biconditional is a trivial matter. For we can disquote the relevant sentence to generate the biconditional, and disquotation is a mechanical procedure. So knowledge of the sentence’s meaning does not do any work in getting one to knowledge of its truth-value. Knowledge of meaning comes in later, in permitting us to understand the right-hand-side of the biconditional—that is, in allowing us to understand just what fact about the world is picked out by the sentence. A kindly deflationist might let us go on to say that “knowing a meaning is at least knowing a truth-condition” (E4). But all that amounts to is that we can understand the right-hand-side of the relevant T-biconditional; and we will always be able to do that if we know what the sentence (to be disquoted) means. So all (E4) amounts to is the claim that if we know what a sentence means, then we know what it means. And that claim is so uncontroversial that it does not favor a truth-condition theory of meaning over any other.

This response, however, overlooks the force of the claim that truth-conditions are needed to explain meaning. According to (E2), when you know a sentence’s meaning you know *something* that allows you to declare the sentence true or false, provided you know the facts. But how is this to be explained, unless (part of) what you know in knowing meaning is the condition of the sentence’s truth? Again, suppose it is suggested that knowledge of the meaning of a sentence consists in grasp of its conceptual role (where that grasp in no way involves grasp of the condition in which the sentence would be true). Then it becomes mysterious how grasp of non-truth-related features of the sentence allows you to assign a truth-value to the sentence (once you know all the facts). The truth-conditionalist idea is that if knowledge of meaning at least involves knowledge of truth-conditions there will be no mystery. For knowing the truth-condition of “Snow is white” is knowing precisely *which* condition is relevant to deciding the sentence’s truth-value. It allows the speaker to single out snow’s whiteness as the relevant condition; so that if she knows that condition to obtain, she can declare the sentence to be true.

Indeed, the argument we gave earlier to show that a sentence’s conceptual role, or social use, and so forth, if individuated independently of truth and reference, will simply not suffice for determining its truth-value, will apply here too. For it seems simply false that knowing a sentence’s conceptual role, or the condition for its proper use, or . . . , can suffice for knowing whether the sentence is true or false (even when one knows all the relevant nonlinguistic facts). It cannot be sufficient, as long as it is understood to be purely

a matter of grasping some non-truth-related role played by the sentence in the language.

## V

It seems, then, that the Determination Argument, whether in its metaphysical or in its epistemological version, casts doubt on the possibility of adequately capturing crucial features of meaning and/or knowledge of meaning without invoking the notion of a truth-condition. At the very least, it makes it legitimate to demand of deflationists something they rarely undertake when defending their view of truth,<sup>38</sup> namely, an explicit defense of their alternative view of meaning against the charge that non-truth-related features of sentences could not suffice for truth-value, even given fact, nor grasp of such features suffice for knowledge of truth-value even given knowledge of fact. Alternatively, our discussion of the Determination Argument in both versions can be seen to cast doubt on the claim repeatedly made by deflationists that being a deflationist about truth is incompatible with holding a truth-condition theory of meaning. In view of our discussion, it may become pressing to re-evaluate the arguments given for this claim. But that is a matter for another day.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Two notable exceptions are Field 1994 and Brandom 1994. A full evaluation of their contributions obviously goes beyond our scope here. However, footnote 34 above will indicate the direction we would take in criticizing their proposals.

<sup>39</sup> We thank Keith Simmons, Peter Alward, and Andrew Mills for extensive and helpful comments on previous drafts.

## 16

## Postscript to 'Deflationism, Meaning, and Truth-Conditions'

DORIT BAR-ON,  
CLAIRE HORISK, and  
WILLIAM G. LYCAN

In our paper we defended a disjunctive conclusion: Either deflationism about truth is false, or the incompatibility claim (that deflationism is incompatible with a truth-conditional view of meaning) must be rejected. We did not go further and decide between those disjuncts, because we had and have differences of opinion in regard to the compatibility question. In what follows we shall separate, and speak individually for the record. Then at the end we shall reunite and offer a joint concluding verdict.

BAR-ON: I think our disjunction may be a bit overly stark, so I shall take this opportunity to elaborate.

Deflationists share a core metaphysical negative claim: that truth is not a genuine, substantive property shared by all and only true sentences. Deflationism can then be seen (in part) as a form of ontological eliminativism: we can eliminate the property of truth from our ontological inventory. But anyone who denies that truth is a genuine property must still make sense of our pervasive truth *talk*. How should we understand the concept of truth? What is the meaning of 'true'? What are the main uses or functions of this expression? In what does a speaker's understanding of the term 'true' consist? To what do we primarily ascribe truth? Is 'true' even a predicate?

Denying that truth is a substantive (or 'robust') property does not by itself suffice for answering these pressing questions. A deflationary view cannot stop with the negative claim; it must offer a positive account that would afford answers to these questions.

We can regard deflationism about truth, then, as consisting of two parts:

- (i) a negative metaphysical claim;
- (ii) an account of the meaning of 'true' or of the concept of truth.

While deflationists agree on (i) they diverge in their treatments of (ii). Given the negative metaphysical claim, deflationists clearly cannot appeal to the property of truth in their account of 'true'. For example, a deflationist cannot assign the property of being true as the meaning of the predicate 'is true'; and she cannot explain our understanding of the predicate as consisting in apprehending the property of being true. The account in (ii) may be semantic, pragmatic, epistemic, logical, or conceptual—or a combination of some of these. The claim common to all deflationisms—that truth is not a robust property—fans out into a wide variety of accounts of 'true'.<sup>1</sup>

The question in front of us is whether the deflationist could live with a theory of meaning that appealed to the notion of a sentence's truth-conditions. If one focuses on the negative part of the deflationist view, it is not immediately obvious that the answer must be 'No'. For it is not at all obvious that the truth-conditionalist is in any way committed to there being a substantive property shared by all and only true sentences (say, 'corresponding to the facts', or being assertible under certain idealized conditions). I myself am rather sympathetic to the negative metaphysical claim made by deflationists ((i) above). For I do not think there is much to be gained by thinking of the metaphysical underpinnings of our truth talk. There is not much hope for finding a substantive, quasi-natural property, which is had by all and only true items, and which we ascribe to them when we call them "true"—a property that can be illuminated through empirical discovery or philosophical analysis. On the other hand, I am impressed by the difficulty of providing a deflationary account of our truth talk. It seems to me that the concept of truth and the term 'true' exhibit enough rich connections to other concepts and other terms to give the lie to deflationary accounts of 'true' (which fall under (ii) above). Chief among these is the connection between truth and meaning, which connection is exploited by truth-conditional theories of meaning.

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing way of presenting deflationism is due to work in progress by Bar-On and K. Simmons (tentatively entitled *Deflationism, Truth, and Meaning*), in which various deflationist accounts of 'true' are critically examined. It is argued in that work that failure to draw the distinction between the two aspects, or parts, of deflationism, may lead to an overly facile dismissal of deflationism. Two examples of this phenomenon are Boghossian 1990 and Wright 1992.

Assuming that truth-conditions are indeed inescapable in a theory of meaning, the question is whether the deflationist can find a way of living with them. The deflationist might try to offer a suitably deflationary construal of the notion of *truth-conditions*. (So I am now envisaging a compatibilist deflationist—one who embraces deflationism yet thinks she can accommodate the role of truth in explaining meaning by co-opting the notion of truth-conditions.)<sup>2</sup> But I think it can be argued that the notion of deflationary—as opposed to ‘robust’—truth-conditions is ill-conceived.

Take your favorite T-sentence, say,

‘Worms wriggle’ is true iff worms wriggle.

The deflationist and the substantivist opponent alike will say that the used sentence on the right hand side is directly about the world, that it describes a worldly condition, the condition that worms wriggle.<sup>3</sup> So on either theory, there is a worldly condition associated with the sentence ‘Worms wriggle’. Now, for the substantivist, say a Davidsonian, this worldly condition will be the condition for the sentence’s *truth*, and it will (at least partially) constitute the meaning of the sentence. The T-sentence is informative and contingent. It is informative: it gives the truth-condition of the sentence, and thereby its meaning. And it is contingent: The sentence ‘Worms wriggle’ might have meant something different, and would then have had a different truth-condition. The relationship between a sentence and the worldly condition that just is its truth-condition is a substantive one; it is one that the Davidsonian will say is to be explored empirically.

On the deflationist line, the worldly condition associated with the sentence is just the same condition as it is for the substantivist. However, the *relation* between the sentence and the condition is quite different. For the deflationist the condition is arrived at simply by disquoting. Roughly speaking, to say that the sentence is true is just to assert or affirm what the sentence says. For the deflationist, the T-sentence is *necessarily* true because of how ‘true’ works. ‘True’ is a logical device that removes the quotes and switches the status of the enclosed sentence from mentioned to used. Given this, it would seem at best misleading to call the worldly

<sup>2</sup> Several authors have appealed to a notion of “*deflationary truth-conditions*”; for example, Field 1994.

<sup>3</sup> The “substantivist” here is someone who thinks truth is a substantive notion, not merely a logical device. That is, it is someone who rejects deflationary accounts falling under (ii). Such a substantivist, though, may agree with the deflationist (as I do) that there is no single ‘robust’ metaphysical property shared by all and only true sentences.

condition a *truth-condition*. A truth-condition for a sentence is a condition such that if it obtains, then the sentence is true, and if it does not (or did not) obtain then the sentence is (or would be) false. And this encourages the idea that the worldly condition confers truth upon the sentence, by being appropriately associated with the sentence. But this idea has no room in the deflationary account. For on that account there can be no substantive relation between the worldly condition and the sentence—no ‘conferring of truth’, and no ‘appropriate association’ between the sentence and the worldly condition.<sup>4</sup>

It seems, then, that it is a mistake to talk of deflationary truth conditions. The deflationist can accept that worldly conditions are associated with sentences by the T-biconditionals. But while for the substantivist these conditions are truth-conditions, for the deflationist they are not really truth-conditions. For the deflationist they are the conditions in the world that are talked about by each side of the T-biconditional, one by using the logical device ‘true’, and the other by simply using the sentence. The deflationist can allow that there are worldly conditions, and there is (deflationary) ‘truth’; what she cannot make room for are conditions *of* truth. If this is right, then deflationism about truth will, after all, be incompatible with a truth-conditional theory of meaning.

HORISK: In our paper, we mentioned two common reasons for holding the incompatibility claim<sup>5</sup>:

- (a) Deflationary truth is too flimsy to have any significant explanatory role in the theory of meaning (or indeed, in any theory).
- (b) There is some kind of circularity in maintaining deflationism and a truth-conditional theory of meaning.

I will comment briefly on the strength of these reasons.

With regard to (a), we argued that truth *must* have an explanatory role in the theory of meaning. If deflationism cannot accommodate that role, so much the worse for deflationism. I do not think this is immediately telling against many brands of deflationism. But it does count as bad news for Grover *et al.*’s (1975) prosentential account of truth and Brandom’s (1994) anaphoric account, neither of which treat ‘is true’ as a predicate. A truth-conditional theory

<sup>4</sup> What I say here is related to our Reply to Objection 3 in the paper.

<sup>5</sup> In the paper, we described the incompatibility claim as the received view. That description is no longer apt. Soames (1999) abandons incompatibility. And since our paper went to press, Soames has been joined by Williams (1999).



of meaning requires at least subject-predicate form on the left side of the T-sentences.

With regard to (b), the combination of deflationism and a truth-conditional theory of meaning is thought to be circular because deflationary truth cannot be understood independently of meaning. Arguments for (b) are seductive at first glance, but they are inadequate because they do not demonstrate that there is something *especially* wrong with mixing deflationism with a truth-conditional theory of meaning. I argued in Horisk (1999) that the charges leveled in the case of deflationism are just as effective against combining *substantivism* about truth and the truth-conditional theory of meaning. Given some simple facts, it is impossible to understand truth (substantively or otherwise) independently of meaning. For one thing, sentences are truth-apt in virtue of being meaningful, and for another, whether a sentence is true or false depends (in part) on what it means. On close examination, we can see that the circularity arguments employ an inaccurate conception of the workings of a truth-conditional theory of meaning. The arguments have their charm because they (wrongly) assume that truth must be understood independently of meaning for compatibility. It is evident in Davidson (1996) that the interdependence of truth and meaning does not stand in the way of an adequate truth-conditional theory of meaning. The circularity arguments are not compelling. If incompatibility is true, that must be demonstrated in some other way.

I am an incompatibilist. My reasons align broadly with Bar-On's: We agree that the deflationist's difficulty lies in giving a positive account of the meaning of "true" or of the concept of truth. I will give a very compressed version of an argument for incompatibility here.<sup>6</sup> The argument has the consequence that deflationism is false.

Suppose that meaning does essentially involve truth-conditions. How is this possible, if the combination of any theory of truth and a truth-conditional theory of meaning is circular? If truth and meaning are intertwined in such a way that one cannot understand one without understanding the other, how can one serve in explanation of the other? Yet (as argued in our paper) truth-conditions do explain something about meaning.

Explanation is possible because there is an alternative, non-definitional way of understanding truth. Take Davidson (1996) for example. He supposes that truth is a rich property. He argues that truth is primitive, but that nevertheless it can be understood through mapping its relations to belief, reason, cause and action. The relationships invoked by Davidson make it possible to understand truth without defining 'true', and so for a truth-conditional the-

ory to offer genuine explanations in the theory of meaning. Davidson's set of relationships offers one way to do this, but there may be other sets that would work just as well. In what follows, I will use Davidson's set, but nothing really hangs on it being those particular relationships.

Davidson and the deflationist are at odds over whether truth is primitive, because it is essential to the deflationist that truth can be (easily) defined. But are they also at odds over the relationships truth bears to belief, reason, cause and action? This question poses a dilemma for deflationism. Suppose the deflationist admits that truth bears those relationships to belief and so on. In this case she can be a Davidsonian about meaning. Truth can play an explanatory role in the theory of meaning, and as we have argued, it must. But then truth is not the flimsy, uninteresting concept the deflationist would like it to be. Deflationism loses its claim that truth is not philosophically interesting because it does not bear significant relationships to other concepts and because it does no explanatory work. In this case, a rich concept of truth can be reconstructed, and the account of truth is not properly deflationist. On this horn of the dilemma, deflationism is distinguishable from substantivism only because it retains the deflationist tenet that truth can be defined. In my book, that's not real deflationism. But now suppose the deflationist denies that truth bears those relationships to belief and so on. She will have to deny such simple claims as that we aim to hold true beliefs and that we act on the beliefs we hold true. In this case, incompatibility holds, but the account of truth is impoverished to the point of implausibility. Such a deflationist cannot carry out her mission of accounting for all the facts about truth. On either horn of the dilemma, deflationism is not good enough - either truth is, after all, an interesting property, or deflationism cannot account for all the facts about truth. So deflationism is false.

LYCAN: I am a compatibilist (Lycan 1984, p. 322). Indeed, until my collaboration with Bar-On and Horisk I had been concerned to defend a considerably stronger thesis, which I called 'Maximetaminimalism': that *it is extremely important not to care what theory of truth is true*. My sympathy is still with that claim, though my confidence has diminished. To date, I have not been convinced by any incompatibilist argument.

In our paper we mentioned arguments of two types: (a) to the effect that if deflationism is true, then truth can play no explanatory role at all, hence no role in explaining linguistic meaning; (b) circularity charges. In their contributions to this Postscript, Bar-On and Horisk have added further considerations on behalf of incompatibility.

(a): We addressed (a) in our section III: Truth-conditions, hence truth, are needed to explain why meaning and fact together determine truth-value. I

<sup>6</sup> A fuller version is to be found in Horisk 1999.

would add that truth is needed for the explanation of purely semantic facts, for example facts of entailment, synonymy, ambiguity and the like. (The explanation is not causal, but not all legitimate and needed explanation is causal explanation.) Moreover, as Horisk says, the deflationist will have trouble accounting for the multifarious Davidsonian connections between truth, belief, reason, and action.

*Ad (b):* The circularity charges I have seen have been impressionistic rather than deductively or otherwise precisely spelled out. Their proponents would have to put up or shut up. (And again see Horisk (1999) for extensive critical discussion of the charges.)

*Ad Bar-On:* She makes the excellent point that, while deflationism's negative claim may itself be entirely compatible with truth-conditional theories of meaning, a given deflationist's particular positive characterization of truth or "truth" may conflict with such theories. And as she says, we compatibilists are committed to the possibility of a deflationist truth-condition. But I am not yet convinced by her argument against such.

The deflationist takes T-sentences to be necessary—which s/he can do only by ceasing to treat their LHS quote-names as naming syntactic strings or sign-designs and taking them as naming English sentences together with those sentences' English meanings (cf. our reply to Objection 3). On that interpretation, Bar-On argues, we would have to reject the idea, encouraged by the term 'truth-condition', that the worldly state of affairs identified by a T-sentence's RHS confers truth upon the target sentence by being appropriately associated with the target sentence. Why would we have to reject that idea? Because "on that account there can be no substantive relation between the worldly condition and the sentence—no 'conferring of truth,' and no 'appropriate association' between the sentence and the worldly condition."

I remain unconvinced. Necessarily, if 'Worms wriggle' means what it does mean, then it is true iff worms wriggle. And let us grant for the sake of argument that 'true' is a logical device of disquotatation, so that "'Worms wriggle' is true iff worms wriggle' is trivially as well as necessarily true (given the actual meaning of 'Worms wriggle'). It does not follow that 'Worms wriggle' is not made true by the fact that worms wriggle, in a suitably deflated sense of 'made true'. Even if for 'Worms wriggle' to be true just is for worms to wriggle, 'Worms wriggle' is (thereby) true in virtue of the fact that worms wriggle and not in virtue of the fact that snow is white.

And, I would note independently (Bar-On does not address this), it certainly does not follow from the deflationist's negative claim alone that Davidsonian or Lewisian semantics directed upon 'Worms wriggle' considered only as a sign-design is misguided. Dummett (1959), Horwich (1990) and Brandom (1994) attack truth-conditional theories of meaning from the deflation-

ist point of view, but, once carefully reconstructed, their arguments will be seen to have further premises, which are disputable.

*Ad Horisk:* She argues as follows. If (i) truth-conditions play an explanatory role in the theory of meaning and (ii) truth and meaning are intertwined in such a way that one cannot understand one without understanding the other, then (iii) we must adopt a non-definitional way of understanding truth. And (iv) we can do that only by appealing to the Davidsonian relations to belief, reason, and action (or perhaps to some comparable set of relations). But (v) appealing to such relations lands the deflationist in Horisk's dilemma: (vi) If we acknowledge that truth stands in the Davidsonian relations or ones like them, and if we grant (vii) that in virtue of its doing so, it plays a role in explaining things about meaning, then truth is not flimsy after all and we have abandoned deflationism; but (viii) if we try to repudiate the Davidsonian etc. relations we will look like idiots. So, (ix) deflationism is false.

I do not grant (ii); nor am I convinced that if (i) and (ii) are true, then so is (iii); (iv) is disputable as well. (However, for defenses of each see again Horisk 1999.)

JOINT CONCLUDING REMARKS: Note that the compatibilist line would require deflating not only 'is true', but also 'truth-conditions', 'making true', and 'in virtue of'. Indeed, one may worry that the deflationist will not be able to stop at that. In our paper we argued that meaning is inextricably involved with truth. But it does not stop there. *Belief* is also apparently involved with it, since to believe P seems to be a matter of holding P to be true. To intend P is to plan to make P the case, which also seems to be a matter of making P true; similarly for desire and the rest of the propositional attitudes. And to *assert* P is plausibly thought to be to represent oneself as taking P to be true. The deflationist cannot avail herself of any such analyses, but would rather have to maintain that in all these cases we can treat 'true' as a purely logical device and proceed without any reference to the substantive truth of sentences or propositions, or to people's taking/wanting/expecting things to be true in any substantive sense.

How might the deflationist then proceed? Regarding belief, Davidson (1967) proposes that we understand belief in terms of the ersatz, unreconstructed notion of 'holding-true'; to believe a sentence *S* is to hold-true *S*. (We get a speaker's sentence's truth-conditions by hypothesizing the conditions under which the speaker would hold-true the sentence.) The deflationist could proceed to deflate the notion of belief by construing holding-true *S* as simply accepting, or affirming, *S*.

Does the burden of deflating (not just truth but) every notion that tacitly presupposes truth spell any new trouble for the deflationist? Maybe not. But

it shows how extensive the deflationist enterprise will have to be. If it turns out that deflationism about truth cannot be suitably 'contained', the prospects of developing it in a tenable way may seem less promising. We hope our discussion will challenge the deflationist either to show how truth is not after all presupposed by the propositional attitudes, or else why there is no problem about deflating the notion of truth wherever it is tacitly employed.

## Pleonastic Propositions

STEPHEN SCHIFFER

### 1. The Face-Value Theory and a Further Question

A theory about belief reports which at face value looks right holds that utterances of the form

(1) A believes that S

are true just in case the referent of the 'A' term stands in the belief relation to the proposition to which the 'that S' term refers. The face-value plausibility of this theory is made plain in the following way.

The part which implies that (1) consists of a two-place transitive verb flanked by slots for two argument singular terms gets its default status by way of being the most straightforward way of accounting for the validity of inferences like these:

Harold believes that there is life on Venus, and so does Fiona.  
So, there is something that they both believe—to wit, that there is life on Venus.

Harold believes everything that Fiona says.  
Fiona says that there is life on Venus.  
So, Harold believes that there is life on Venus.