The Use of Force Against Deflationism: Assertion and Truth

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Deflationists share a core negative claim, that truth is not a genuine, substantive property. Deflationism can be seen in part as a form of eliminativism: we can eliminate the property of truth from our ontological inventory. This is the distinctive claim of what we will call *metaphysical deflationism*. But anyone who accepts metaphysical deflationism must still make sense of our pervasive truth *talk*. What is it we are doing when we call something true, if we are not ascribing a genuine property? What is the meaning of the word "true"? What are its main uses or functions? And how should we understand the *concept* of truth and the role it plays in both ordinary and philosophical discourse? An acceptable deflationism must supplement the negative metaphysical claim with an account of the word "true" as well as an account of our concept of truth.

In what follows, we wish to keep separate three deflationary claims that, it seems to us, have been run together in the literature. There is first the metaphysical claim common to all deflationists that truth is not a genuine property. Second, there is the particular account of various everyday uses of the word "true" (or the phrase "is true"). Deflationary accounts of "true" vary widely: the common metaphysical core fans out into disquotationalism, minimalism, the redundancy theory, the prosentential theory, and more. Call this *linguistic deflationism*. Third, there is what we will call *conceptual deflationism*: the claim that an acceptable deflationary account of "true" will give us *all* there is to know or understand about the concept of truth and its potential explanatory role. A thoroughgoing deflationary account of truth will go beyond the negative metaphysical claim and the positive linguistic account of "true": it will also maintain that the concept of truth is a 'thin' concept that can play no substantive explanatory role in our conceptual scheme. As recently presented by Williams (1999), deflationists share the idea that the function of truth talk is "*wholly* expressive, never *explanatory*": truth talk *only* serves to allow us "to endorse or reject sentences (or propositions) that we cannot simply assert." "[W]hat makes deflationary views deflationary," Williams claims, "is their insistence that the importance of truth talk is *exhausted* by its expressive function".[1]

Deflationists and their opponents often seem to take it that conceptual deflationism falls out of metaphysical and linguistic deflationism. If metaphysical deflationism is right, then we cannot assign the property of being true as the meaning of "true," and we cannot explain our understanding of "true" as consisting in the apprehension of this property. Now suppose we accept this or that deflationary account of "true." Shouldn't we further accept that the account exhausts our understanding of the concept of truth? But if so, then in explicating any seemingly truth-related concept, we can appeal to nothing more than the preferred deflationary account of "true." The concept of truth can thus bear no substantive conceptual connections to other concepts of interest to us, such as meaning, validity, belief, assertion, verification, explanation, practical success, and so on. We will thus be left with a deflated concept of truth – a 'thin' concept

whose understanding is exhausted by the deflationary account of "true," a concept that is isolated from all other concepts of interest to us and can play no substantive explanatory role with respect to them.

In this paper, we do not plan to take metaphysical deflationism to task. We put to one side the deflationist claim that we stand to gain nothing from appealing to a substantive property of truth. We also do not plan to challenge linguistic deflationism by criticizing the success of particular deflationist treatments of "true." Our main concern is with conceptual deflationism: the claim that our understanding of truth is fully exhausted by this or that particular deflationary account of "true," so that a deflated, 'thin' concept of truth is all that we need in our conceptual scheme. In our view, even if it is granted that paradigmatic uses of "is true" can be treated in a deflationary way, this does not show that we have no need for a richer concept of truth than is allowed by deflationary accounts. As against the conceptual deflationist, it can be argued that there are ineliminable connections between truth and other concepts. For example, it might be argued that an account of *linguistic meaning* cannot be provided without invoking the notion of truth.[2] Our main interest in this paper is in the illocutionary notion of *assertion*. We will argue that there is a conceptual link between truth and assertion that cannot be broken, and that our understanding of the concept of assertion requires more than a deflated concept of truth. So much the worse, then, for conceptual deflationism.

I. Deflating truth

As we have presented conceptual deflationism, it is committed to the claim that truth cannot play any substantive explanatory role. If this is so, the deflationist ought to tell us what to make of various apparent connections between truth and other concepts of interest to us. It has been claimed that the deflationist can readily endorse such connections.[3] To set the scene, let us consider two apparent platitudes that tie together the notions of truth, truth-aptness, assertion and belief. First, if a sentence is truth-apt – that is, either true or false – and I utter it sincerely, then I have made an assertion. Second,

> assertion has the following analytical tie to belief: if someone makes an assertion, and is supposed sincere, it follows that she has a belief whose content can be captured by means of the sentence used. (Wright 1992: 14)

Consequently, there is an apparently platitudinous tie (perhaps an analytic one) between truth-aptness and belief: a sentence is truth-apt only if it can be used to give the content of a belief. From a commonsensical point of view, this is just what we would expect. If I sincerely utter the truth-apt sentence "Aardvarks amble," it seems that I have asserted it; and it further seems that I have said what I believe about the world, where the content of my belief is given by the sentence "Aardvarks amble."

According to Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994), platitudinous conceptual connections must be preserved by any good analysis:

> … when we do conceptual analysis we have to respect platitudinous connections. They are the very stuff that conceptual analyses are made from. In analyzing a concept our aim is to capture the network of platitudes that surround that concept, and so capture its meaning. (Jackson, Oppy, and Smith 1994: 294)

Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994: 296-7) think we can adopt a certain view of conceptual analysis that they regard as "minimal." The view is this: when we analyze a concept, the analysis should comprise all the platitudes about the concept and nothing more. Call this view *platitude-respecting minimalism*. The view is minimal in the sense that it supposedly requires us to make no controversial assumptions.

In particular, a platitude-respecting minimalist *about truth* will embrace platitudinous conceptual ties between truth, truth-aptness, assertion and belief. These ties, though platitudinous, may be quite substantial, according to Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994). For example, to show that a sentence is truth-apt, it needs to be shown:

> that the state an agent is in when she is disposed to utter a sentence … bears the relations to information, action and rationality required for the state to count as a belief. This is a substantial matter. (Jackson, Oppy, and Smith 1994: 296)

So the platitude-respecting minimalist will endorse substantive connections between truth and other concepts.

If, as Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994) assume, platitude-respecting minimalism is a version of deflationism, then we cannot maintain the general claim that deflationists isolate truth from other concepts. But platitude-respecting minimalism should *not* count as a genuine form of deflationism. Deflationists do not take platitudes about truth as their starting point. Rather, deflationists are motivated by the thought that much of what is said about truth, about its nature and role and connections to other concepts, is radically misguided. Apparent platitudes about truth cannot be taken at face value. Instead, they are to be regarded with some suspicion – it may be these very platitudes that encourage the thought that truth is a substantive notion. Indeed, it seems that the deflationist would reject the basic methodology of platitude-respecting minimalism, given its commitment to incorporating everyday platitudes into the theoretical analysis of truth. The commonsense platitudes can mislead us into thinking that truth is a substantive, explanatory notion. Yet, if conceptual deflationism is right, there is nothing more to our understanding of truth than what is captured by a preferred deflationist account of "true."

For a test case, consider the following apparent platitude: *true beliefs engender successful action*.[4] On its face, this "fact about truth"[5] seems to forge substantial links between truth, belief, and action. But according to the deflationist, this appearance is misleading: we need only a deflationary account of truth to explain the role of truth in this thesis. Consider Horwich's (1990) account

of such "facts about truth." The axioms of Horwich's minimal theory of truth are all and only the instances of the sentence schema:

The proposition that p is true if and only if p,

instances like "The proposition that penguins waddle is true if and only if penguins waddle." The denominalizing function of "true" embodied in these axioms exhausts what there is to be said by way of explaining truth – no other notions enter into the theory. The minimal theory of truth is "*a theory of truth that is a theory of nothing else.*"[6] Moreover, it is a *complete* theory of truth – we are not to gain *further* understanding of truth by appeal to anything other than the equivalences. In particular, alleged platitudes that make use of truth locutions cannot be regarded as in any way *enhancing* our understanding of truth. By the same token, if we resort to truth-talk in our explication of other concepts, we cannot expect the notion of truth to contribute to our understanding of these concepts beyond what is afforded by the minimal theory, since:

all of the facts whose expression involves the truth predicate may be explained … by assuming no more about truth than instances of the equivalence schema. (Horwich 1990: 24)

In particular, Horwich argues that this is so for the thesis that true beliefs engender successful action. Horwich considers the following instance:

If all Bill wants is to have a beer, and he thinks that merely by nodding he will get one, then, if his belief is true, he will get what he wants.

At one point in his explanation, Horwich makes "the familiar psychological assumption" that if one has a desire, and believes that a certain action will satisfy that desire, one will perform the action.[7] That is, conceptual connections are assumed between belief, desire, and action. But *all* that is assumed about truth in Horwich's explanation is its denominalizing role. In the course of the explanation, we move from "The proposition that if Bill nods then Bill has a beer is true" to "If Bill nods then Bill has a beer"; and a little later we move from "Bill has a beer" to "The proposition that Bill has a beer is true." These are the only steps where truth has a role to play, and it is the role given to it by the equivalence schema.

This style of explanation, says Horwich, may be universalized to show how in general true beliefs lead to successful action. And beyond that, it extends to all other facts involving "true." The explanation of all these facts will, according to Horwich's minimalism, appeal to no more about truth than is given by the instances of the T-schema. In explaining these facts, we will not improve our grasp of truth, or deepen our understanding of it. Nor does the explanation of other concepts invoke anything more than what we've described as a 'thin' concept of truth – what is captured by the minimalist definition. We presumably learn more about, for example, the concepts of belief, desire and action by an improved understanding of their inter-relations. But there will be no such improvement in the case of truth: the equivalence schema tells us all there is to know about truth,

and it exhausts all that the notion of truth can contribute to our understanding of any other concept. In this sense, truth is isolated from other concepts.

This isolationism is not peculiar to Horwich's minimalism. Consider disquotationalism. According to the disquotationalist, there is no more to the truth of, say, the sentence "Aardvarks amble" than is given by the disquotation of its quote name. One can think of the so-called T-sentence:

"Aardvarks amble" is true if and only if aardvarks amble

as a partial definition of "true": the biconditional defines "true" with respect to the sentence "Aardvarks amble." And all such T-sentences together constitute an exhaustive and complete definition of "true."

The idea behind the disquotational view is sometimes put this way: to say that a sentence is true is really just an indirect way of saying the sentence itself. To say that the sentence "Penguins waddle" is true is just an indirect way of saying that penguins waddle. This prompts the question: Why not dispense with the truth-predicate in favor of direct talk about the world? The disquotationalist will respond by pointing to generalizations such as "Every sentence of the form 'p or not p' is true" and to truth-ascriptions such as "What Joe said is true." In the case of the generalization, we could dispense with the truth-predicate here if we could produce an infinite conjunction of sentences of the form "p or not p": Aardvarks amble or aardvarks do not amble, and bison bathe or bison don't bathe or…. But we cannot produce such an infinite conjunction, and instead we achieve the desired effect by generalizing over sentences, and then bringing those sentences back down to earth by means of the truth predicate.[8] In cases like "What Joe said is true," where the target utterance is picked out by means other than a quote-name, "true" serves to express an infinite disjunction:

What Joe said = "s_1" and s_1, or

What Joe said = "s_2" and s_2, or

…,

where "s_1", "s_2", … are quote-names of the sentences of Joe's language. The truth-predicate, says the disquotationalist, is a logical device: a device for disquotation, and for expressing infinite conjunctions and disjunctions.[9] There is no more to the meaning of "true" than its disquotational role. And moreover there is no more to our understanding of the concept of truth than an understanding of the disquotational role of the truth-predicate. If the concept of truth is a 'thin' concept in this sense, then it can make no substantive contribution to our understanding of assertion, meaning, belief, or any other concept in this cluster. Explanations of these notions that make use of the truth-predicate can avail themselves only of its role as a logical device of disquotation.

In this vein, Field, a leading disquotationalist, observes that it may *seem* as though we need to appeal to truth to characterize the realist doctrine that "there might be (…) sentences of our languages that are true that we will never have reason to believe" (Field 1999: 369) (where the realist is contrasted with the anti-

realist, who identifies truth with some notion of justifiability). However, Field claims that the role of truth in such a characterization is "purely logical" (*ibid.*). But for our finite limitations, the realist doctrine *could* be expressed without use of a truth-predicate via an infinite disjunction (where each disjunct is of the form "*p* and we will never have reason to believe *p*.") And Field thinks that appeal to truth in general claims such as that there is "a 'norm' of asserting and believing the truth" is merely disquotational.[10] The idea is that such general claims are in effect abbreviations for infinite conjunctions. The disquotationalist denies the concept of truth any substantive explanatory role.

Or consider Ramsey's redundancy theory. According to Ramsey, truth and falsity are ascribed to propositions, where the propositions may be given explicitly (as in "It is true that Caesar was murdered") or indirectly (as in "He is always right"). In the first case, the word "true" is readily eliminated: "… it is evident that 'It is true that Caesar was murdered' means no more than that Caesar was murdered…" (Ramsey 1927: 106). "True" and "false" are merely terms "which we sometimes use for emphasis or for stylistic reasons, or to indicate the position occupied by the statement in our argument" (Ramsey 1927: 106). Beyond this, "true" is redundant, and clearly has no substantive connections to other concepts. In the second case, it is not so obvious that "true" is eliminable:

> Thus if I say "He is always right", I mean that the propositions he asserts are always true, and there does not seem to be any way of expressing this without using the word "true". But suppose we put it thus "For all p, if he asserts p, p is true", then we see that the propositional function p is true is simply the same as p, as e.g. its value "Caesar was murdered is true" is the same as "Caesar was murdered". (Ramsey 1927: 106)

So in the second case too, Ramsey says, "true" is eliminable. Ramsey dismisses any problem about what it is for a proposition or judgment to be true – just make the judgment. For Ramsey, the real question is what is involved in making a judgment in the first place. Ramsey's essentially behavioristic approach to belief and judgment makes connections to various concepts, including *use* and *commitment*; but as far as truth is concerned, there is no place in this account for anything but a 'thin' concept of truth.

For Ramsey, "true" is an eliminable predicate. For the prosententialist, it is not even a predicate at all,[11] but rather a component of *prosentences*. In the discourse:

Mary: Chicago is large.

John: If that is true, it probably has a large airport.

the expression "that is true" is a prosentence, which shares its content with its antecedent, namely "Chicago is large." On the prosentential view, "true" serves as a purely grammatical prosentence-forming operator. Under the prosententialist analysis, it does not survive as a discrete term expressing a separable concept that could stand in relations to other concepts.

These various deflationary accounts – minimalism, disquotationalism, the redundancy theory, and prosententialism – differ in various ways. They differ, for example, over the utility of the truth predicate, the bearers of truth, and the grammar of "true." But their proponents share an *isolationist* view of truth: the claim that a complete account of truth will proceed independently of the concepts to which truth is traditionally tied – meaning, belief, assertion, and the rest. As Hill (2002: 4) puts it, an acceptable form of deflationism will maintain that "there is no particular set of concepts that one must acquire prior to acquiring the concept of truth"; it will present "truth as autonomous and presuppositionless."[12] Moreover, to explain facts whose statements involves truth-locutions all we need to assume about truth, according to the deflationist, is what falls out of the preferred deflationist account of "true." Isolationism cuts both ways: our understanding of truth is exhausted by the deflationary account, and truth in turn has no role in explaining other concepts, beyond the purely logical or grammatical role assigned to it by the deflationary account. Any appeal to substantive connections between truth and other concepts is based on a mistaken, inflated idea of truth.

We take isolationism to be a component of any genuine form of deflationism. It is telling that leading deflationists such as Horwich and Field explicitly spell out the isolationist consequences of their deflationary theories. But "deflationism" is a slippery term, with no agreed fixed extension – perhaps there are those who would still want to count platitude-respecting minimalism as a kind of deflationism. To avoid terminological distractions, we describe our target as *conceptual deflationism*: the view that a deflationary account of "is true" (be it minimalist, disquotationalist, prosententialist, or some other) will give us *all* there is to know or understand about the concept of truth and its explanatory role. As explained at the outset, we think that conceptual deflationism should be kept distinct from both *metaphysical deflationism* (which eliminates the property of truth from our ontological inventory) and *linguistic deflationism* (which offers this or that deflationary account of various everyday uses of the word "true"). To defend conceptual deflationism it is not enough to give arguments for the futility of appealing to a metaphysically robust relation obtaining between items we call "true" and something else (reality, facts, the way things are). Nor is it enough to provide a recipe for eliminating "is true" from our everyday discourse in which we apply it to sentences or other items. We need to see how to deflate the explanatory role apparently played by truth in elucidations of various concepts of interest to us. In what follows, our principal focus will be *assertion*. We will be arguing that understanding assertion requires more that the 'thin' concept of truth afforded by deflationary accounts.

Before turning to assertion, however, it may be useful to clarify further what we take to be at stake regarding conceptual deflationism. An analogy might help. Consider for example the predicate "is good." Many philosophers would deny that there is a *sui generis* nonnatural property denoted by this predicate. Some of them – call them "ethical reductionists" – propose to identify the property of being good with some natural property (though they disagree amongst

themselves on *which* natural property it is). Other philosophers, however, might deny that "is good" denotes *any* property, natural or not. These philosophers – call them "ethical eliminativists" – might suggest that we can eliminate the property of being good from our ontological inventory altogether; for there is no single feature that is shared by all and only things we call good. The eliminativist owes us a story about ethical discourse. What is it that we're doing when we call something "good"? What is the meaning of "is good" as it is used in everyday discourse? And so on. An *ethical expressivist,* for example, might suggest that "is good" serves an expressive function – perhaps it is used to express approval, or some other pro-attitude. Crude as this map may be, we hope it can serve to recall familiar debates in metaethics. What is relevant about the ethical case for our purposes is the fact that it would seem implausible to claim that goodness is a 'thin' concept – that it serves no explanatory role save what can be captured by some purely formal specification of the things that "is good" applies to, and that it bears no rich connections to other concepts. Contemporary ethical noncognitivists, it seems, want to preserve the explanatory role of ethical concepts and to exhibit the place each of them occupies in a complex and rich network of concepts that hold interest for us.[13]

As we see it, deflationists tend to overlook the possibility of an analogous position regarding truth. Eager to eliminate truth from our ontology and impressed by this or that deflationary treatment of "is true," they have lost sight of the place the concept of truth occupies in our conceptual scheme. Yet it seems to us that metaphysical deflationism and linguistic deflationism, taken either separately or together, do *not* entail conceptual deflationism. This is what we hope to show below.

II. Truth and the force of assertion

Frege writes:

When we inwardly recognize that a thought is true, we are making a judgement: when we communicate this recognition, we are making an assertion.[14] (Frege 1979: 139)

Making a judgement, Frege emphasized, must be sharply distinguished from the entertaining of a thought – we must not confuse merely predicating with judging. And, in parallel, assertion must be sharply distinguished from the mere expression or articulation of a thought. This is reflected in Frege's judgement sign |– from the *Begriffsschrift*. The horizontal stroke – the so-called "content-stroke" – combines the symbols following it into a whole thought; the vertical stroke – the "judgement-stroke" – expresses the recognition or affirmation that this thought is *true*.

If we *omit* the little vertical stroke at the left end of the horizontal stroke, then the judgement is to be transformed into *a mere complex of ideas*; the author is not expressing his recognition or non-recognition of the truth of this. (Frege 1879:1-2)

Sometimes the mere expression of a thought is all that matters. In section 2 of the Begriffsschrift, Frege points out that one might present the thought that unlike magnetic poles attract one another merely for hypothetical consideration – one's intention is:

> just to produce in the reader the idea of the mutual attraction of unlike magnetic poles – so that, e.g., he may make inferences from this thought and test its correctness on the basis of these.(Frege 1879: 2)

Or the thought might be the antecedent of a conditional; as Frege (1979: 185-6) puts it, "… even if the whole compound sentence is uttered with assertoric force, one is still asserting neither the truth of the thought in the antecedent nor that of the thought in the consequent." Or again, it might be what Frege (1979: 130) calls a "mock thought" of fiction.

But, says Frege, the logician has no interest in mock thoughts[15] or, more generally, in the mere presentations of thoughts: "the thing that indicates most clearly the essence of logic is the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered" (Frege 1979: 252). And, according to Frege, assertoric force is to be understood in terms of truth: to assert that p is to present p as true (or, as Frege sometimes puts it, *to express one's acknowledgement of p as true*, or *to express one's affirmation of p as true*).

Frege's view of assertion is a natural one. When I assert that penguins waddle, I am not merely predicating waddling of penguins (where, for Frege, 'merely predicating waddling of penguins' is that component common to *stating* that penguins waddle, *asking* or *wondering* whether penguins waddle, *promising* to make it so that penguins waddle, and so on). Nor am I merely presenting the thought that penguins waddle for consideration. There are many speech-acts I can perform that involve a given thought: I can suppose it, propose it, float it, question it. I can also express a thought in the course of asserting (or questioning, or supposing, etc.) a compound proposition, such as a conditional or disjunction. Frege plausibly claims that the distinguishing mark of assertion – what sets it apart from other speech-acts – is the fact that when I assert something, I present a certain thought *as true*.

Commenting on this aspect of Frege's view, Dummett says:

> When we make an assertion we are not merely uttering a sentence with determinate truth-conditions understood by the hearer, and hence with a particular truth-value; that, after all, we should do if the sentence expressed only part of what we were asserting – for instance, if it were the antecedent of a conditional. We are also, rightly or wrongly, saying that the sentence is true. This activity of asserting that the thought we are expressing is true is *sui generis*: it is not a further determination of the truth-conditions of the sentence, which remain unchanged whether we are asserting it to be true or not, but rather something which we *do* with a sentence whose truth-conditions have already been fixed. This is not the only thing we can do with a sentence: we can use it in giving a definition, in asking a question (of

the kind requiring the answer "Yes" or "No"), or in the course of telling a story. (Dummett: 1978: 106)

The kind of 'doing' Dummett is speaking of here – which he associates with Frege's notion of the force of an utterance, as opposed to its sense – is not restricted to speech-acts. It has its analogue in thought. Frege also wanted to distinguish the mere entertaining of a thought from the making of a *judgment*. And here again, the difference is to be captured in terms of *truth*. To judge that *p*, as opposed to merely entertaining the thought that *p*, or considering whether *p*, is to take *p* to be *true*. Moreover, judging, entertaining, considering, and so on, are attitudes or mental acts involving a single kind of entity – a *thought*. And, as Dummett points out, Frege's characterization of thoughts itself also appeals to the notion of truth:

What, then, distinguishes thoughts from other constituents of our mental life, from mental images, ideas, feelings, desires, impulses, and the rest? That was the question Frege asked, and was the first to strive to answer: and his first step toward an answer was to say that thoughts, and only they, are apt to being characterized as being true or as being false. (Dummett 1993: 154)

The notion of truth, then, has a central role to play in Frege's account of assertion, judgment, and thought.[16]

The foregoing serves to usher in the following challenge for the conceptual deflationist: to explain how to achieve a proper theoretical understanding of what it is to assert or judge that *p* without help from the concept of truth. What is it, for the deflationist, to put forward a thought with the force of an assertion or judgment? What is it that one is *doing* when one judges or asserts *p*, as opposed to merely supposing it, or considering it, and so on? And, in the mental realm specifically, what is it that distinguishes having a *thought* from other kinds of mental episode? Frege suggests that in answering these questions we ourselves, as theorists, must appeal to a notion of truth.

How might the deflationist respond? Consider disquotationalism or Horwich's minimalism. According to this kind of deflationary view, the function of "true" is exhausted by its disquotational or denominalizing role. For example, "true" contributes no more than its denominalizing role to an explanation of why true beliefs engender successful action. Now consider the thesis that to assert is to present as true. The thesis invokes a certain concept – that of *presenting as true* – in a natural explanation of assertion. It also involves the use of the truth-predicate; in Horwich's terms, it is a fact about "true" that needs to be explained. With the denominalizing role of "true" in mind, a deflationist might claim that the thesis that *to assert that p is to present p as true* is equivalent to the thesis that *to assert that p is to present p*. This commits us to the claim that to present *p* as true is just to present *p*; for example, to present as true the thought that aardvarks amble is just to present the thought that aardvarks amble.[17] But this claim is false, for there are many ways to present a thought. I can present a thought as worthy of your consideration, or as a conjecture, or as a remote possibility, or as outrageous – and

I can also present it as true. Presenting as true is just one way of presenting. So this cannot be the right way to denominalize away "true" in the locution "present as true."

It might be suggested that the correct denominalizing move is a wholesale 'semantic descent': to present the proposition that aardvarks amble as true is just to present aardvarks as ambling. Here not only truth drops out, but so does the proposition (or thought, or sentence) that is said to be presented as true.[18] The claim "to assert that aardvarks amble is to present the proposition that aardvarks amble as true" is just a roundabout way of saying "to assert that aardvarks amble is to present aardvarks as ambling." But what is it to present aardvarks as ambling? One way of understanding this claim is as saying that we present the worldly mammals, aardvarks, as engaging in a certain kind of activity, as when a zoo-keeper gestures toward ambling aardvarks. But this will clearly not do as an explanation of assertion. (Asserting that aardvarks amble does not require the presence of ambling aardvarks; that is part of the point of assertion.)[19] A more plausible way of understanding the present suggestion is as saying that presenting aardvarks as ambling is a matter of *re*presenting aardvarks a certain way – as, well, ambling. But not any old form of representing would do the trick of capturing what is distinctive about asserting (or judging) that aardvarks amble, as opposed to, say, merely pointing to or drawing a picture of (or forming a mental image of) ambling aardvarks. The kind of representing that is relevant to assertion is surely 'factual' representation: representing things *as being so*, or describing things *as they are*. But it seems that the very same task will face the deflationist, this time with respect to representation: how to understand what it is *to represent as being so*, which is a special kind of representing, just as presenting as true is a special kind of presenting. It does not seem that a deflationist would want to trade truth-talk in favor of unreconstructed talk of 'the way things are' or 'its being thus and so', etc. So the detour via representation will be of no help to the deflationist.

We cannot, then, denominalize away "true" as it appears in "present as true." The point applies equally well to the other locutions that Frege employs. It is implausible to claim that Frege's uses of "true" in "express one's recognition that p is true" or "express one's acknowledgement of p as true," or "express one's affirmation of p as true" are redundant; one can recognize or acknowledge or affirm a thought in various ways. And if it is insisted that to recognize (acknowledge, affirm) is just the same as to recognize as true (acknowledge as true, affirm as true), then the involvement of truth should instead be regarded as implicit. For now the notions *recognize*, *acknowledge*, and *affirm* must be understood respectively along the lines of *apprehend as true*, *register as true*, and *put forward as true*. "True" in the theorist's mouth still cannot be disquoted or denominalized away, and the deflationist must find another tack.

According to the present objection, we are to explain what it is to assert in terms of presenting as true, and the deflationist does not have the resources to accommodate this explanation. But a deflationist might respond as follows:

I accept that there is an undeniable connection between assertion and truth. But it is misleading to present the connection in terms of the slogan *to assert is to present as true*. Better to reverse the order: *to present as true is to assert*. Assertion is not to be characterized in terms of truth; rather, our use of the predicate 'true' is to be characterized in terms of assertion. The objection gets the direction of explanation the wrong way around.

The idea is this: to predicate "true" of a sentence (or a thought, or a proposition) *is just to assert the sentence (thought, proposition)*. To say:

"Penguins waddle" is true

is just to assert the sentence "Penguins waddle." We assert the sentence, we present it as true, by predicating "true" of it. Ayer puts it this way:

> … to say that a proposition is true is just to assert it, and to say that it is false is just to assert its contradictory. And this indicates that the terms "true" and "false" connote nothing, but function in the sentence simply as marks of assertion and denial. And in that case there can be no sense in asking us to analyze the concept of "truth".[20] (Ayer 1936: 88-9)

This is what we may call an *illocutionary* form of deflationism. We use "true" not to describe sentences or propositions, but rather to perform the speech-act of assertion. The term "true" is not really a property-denoting predicate; nor does it express a concept that stands in need of analysis, or can play an explanatory role in the explanation of assertion. The illocutionary deflationist will take on board the equivalence thesis, and agree that the content of "'Aardvarks amble' is true" is no different from that of "Aardvarks amble." But though "true" does not add content, it does introduce assertoric force: to say "'Aardvarks amble' is true" is to produce an assertion with the content that aardvarks amble.

We can understand Ayer as suggesting that "true" and "false" play a role very similar to that played by *explicit performatives*. Saying "*p* is true" is equivalent to saying "I *assert p*." But on this reading of Ayer's proposal, his remark that "there can be no sense in asking us to analyze the concept of 'truth'" seems wrong. For we (theorists of language) do seek analyses of explicit performatives such as "assert." Perhaps Ayer would say that what makes no sense is to seek a *particular* kind of analysis: one which pairs up with "is true" a special worldly property – the property of being true. It is a mistake – a kind of category mistake – to engage in that kind of search, since calling something "true" is not predicating a property of it; rather it is articulating a kind of act one is performing in putting *p* forward. If so, Ayer is also advocating what we earlier called metaphysical deflationism: the denial that there is any need to populate our ontology with a substantive property of truth to serve as the extension of our truth predicate.

Like Ayer, Frege emphasizes the illocutionary aspect or role of truth. Frege regards truth as belonging to the same family of concepts as assertion and judgment. Truth is associated with what we *do* when we use language and when we think, rather than with the content of what we say or think. Moreover, Frege

famously endorses the equivalence thesis, that "p" and "'p' is true" are equivalent in content.[21] So is Frege a deflationist (as is often supposed), perhaps an illocutionary deflationist? No: it is striking that Frege is fundamentally opposed to illocutionary deflationism, and deflationism more generally.

At the core of disquotationalism, minimalism and the redundancy theory is the familiar equivalence thesis – for instance, "Sea-water is salt" is equivalent to "'Sea-water is salt' is true" (or "The proposition that sea-water is salt is true"). And Frege certainly endorses this equivalence. In his terms, both sentences express the same thought, and "[t]he word 'true' is not an adjective in the ordinary sense" (Frege 1979: 251). Frege writes:

> If I attach the word "salt" to the word "sea-water" as a predicate, I form a sentence that expresses a thought. To make it clearer that we have only the expression of a thought, but that nothing is meant to be asserted, I put the sentence in the dependent form "that sea-water is salt". … With the word "true" the matter is quite different. If I attach this to the words "that sea-water is salt" as a predicate, I likewise form a sentence that expresses a thought. For the same reason as before I put this also in the dependent form "that it is true that sea-water is salt". The thought expressed in these words coincides with the sense of the sentence "that sea-water is salt". So the sense of the word "true" is such that it does not make any essential contribution to the thought. (Frege 1979: 251)

Predicating "true" of a sentence makes no difference to the thought expressed: it is the same thought. But according to Frege, "true" also makes no difference to the *force* with which the thought is expressed. Frege immediately goes on to say:

> If I assert "it is true that sea-water is salt", I assert the same thing as if I assert "sea-water is salt". This enables us to recognize that the assertion is not to be found in the word "true" …(Frege 1979: 251)

> If one's deflationary view of "true" is based on the equivalence thesis, then according to Frege "true" cannot be the mark of assertion. Indeed, Frege says that "there is no word or sign in language whose function is simply to assert something" (Frege 1979: 185).

Frege is explicitly opposed to illocutionary deflationism, and for good reason. If one accepts the equivalence thesis, there is no difference between asserting that *p* and asserting that *p* is true. Further, the locution "*p* is true" can occur as the antecedent of a conditional, where it cannot be produced with assertoric force – as in "If it is true that aardvarks amble, then… ." Further still, I can say "It is true that aardvarks amble" with a variety of different illocutionary forces – I can be supposing, conjecturing, pretending, or acting. Frege writes:

> One can, indeed, say: "The thought, that 5 is a prime number, is true." But closer examination shows that nothing more has been said than in the simple sentence "5 is a prime number." The truth claim arises in each case from the form of the declarative sentence, and when the latter lacks its

usual force, e.g. in the mouth of an actor upon the stage, even the sentence "The thought that 5 is a prime number is true" contains only a thought, and indeed the same thought as the simple "5 is a prime number". (Frege 1892: 64)

The use of "true" doesn't produce assertoric force; rather, "… even where we use the form of expression "it is true that…" the essential thing is really the assertoric form of the sentence" (Frege 1979: 129). So although Frege appears to give a deflationary account of the word "true", he explicitly rejects illocutionary deflationism.

Moreover Frege's remarks about *truth* seem inhospitable to conceptual deflationism. For example:

Truth is obviously something so primitive and simple that it is not possible to reduce it to anything still simpler (Frege 1979: 129).

The goal of scientific endeavour is *truth* (Frege 1979: 2; italics in the original).

Logic is the science of the most general laws of truth (Frege 1979: 128).

It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference (Frege 1892: 63).

Clearly we must distinguish what Frege says about the word "true," and what he says about truth. Frege writes:

If I assert that the sum of 2 and 3 is 5, then I thereby assert that it is true that 2 and 3 make 5. So I assert that it is true that my idea of Cologne Cathedral agrees with reality, if I assert that it agrees with reality. Therefore it is really by using the form of an assertoric sentence that we assert truth, and to do this we do not need the word "true." (Frege 1979: 129)

We do *not* "assert truth" (as Frege puts it) by predicating "true" or by prefixing the operator "It is true that." Rather, we assert truth by *using a sentence with assertoric force*:

In order to put something forward as true, we do not need a special predicate: we need only the assertoric force with which the sentence is uttered. (Frege 1979: 233)

Science aims at the truth, and "logic is the science of the most general laws of truth" – but it does not follow that science or logic is concerned with the word "true":

… what logic is really concerned with is not contained in the word "true" at all but in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered. (Frege 1979: 252)

How should we understand Frege on truth? One way is that truth is a simple, unanalysable yet substantive primitive that is implicated ("asserted") not by the use of any special word or phrase that *denotes* it, but only by utterances

made with the appropriate kind of illocutionary force – assertoric force. A second way is suggested by Greimann (2004: 431): "truth is a constituent of the assertoric force with which assertoric sentences are normally uttered."[22] In either case, truth is bound up with assertion in a way that vitiates conceptual deflationism. For, on either way of reading Frege, grasp of the concept of truth cannot be exhausted by any deflationary account of "true"; it requires understanding the fundamental connection between truth and assertion. So, while Frege explicitly embraces the equivalence thesis, which is common to all *linguistic* deflationists, he should be seen as denying *conceptual* deflationism, along with its isolationist commitments. Far from assigning no explanatory role to the concept of truth, or isolating it from other theoretical concepts of interest, he takes it to be a central notion in his philosophy of language and thought, intimately interwoven with other central notions.

We think that Frege teaches us a very important lesson. Deflationism about the word "true" is one thing, deflationism about the concept of truth quite another. Frege endorses the equivalence thesis about "true." He denies that "true" introduces descriptive content when appended to sentences or thoughts. He also denies that the use of "true" introduces any illocutionary force, or plays the role of an explicit performative. But for all that Frege is not a conceptual deflationist.

To fully appreciate Frege's lesson, it is helpful to distinguish uses of "true" in a language we theorize about from uses of "true" in the language in which we do our theorizing. Deflationists typically focus on uses of "true" in locutions such as "'Aardvarks amble' is true" (where "true" applies to the quote-name of sentences), "Socrates' last utterance was true" (where "true" is applied to a sentence picked out by means other than its quote name), and "Everything Plato said was true" (where "true" is applied to a domain of sentences). Call these *first-order* uses of "true." In these uses, "true" is applied to sentences (or utterances, or propositions). Disquotationalists, minimalists and redundancy theorists aim to provide accounts of all first-order uses of "true," accounts which attribute to "true" a disquotational or denominalizing or prosentence-forming role. It may even be claimed that "true" can in principle be extruded altogether from the language; for example, as we saw in connection with disquotationalism, it might be claimed that if only we could handle infinite lists, "true" could be replaced by infinite disjunctions and conjunctions.

Given a language from which "true" is in this way eliminable, it is tempting to conclude that there is no substantive role for the concept of truth to play regarding this language. After all, with the word "true" eliminated, we do not even have a term to express the concept of truth. If "true" is to be regarded merely as a device for forming infinite disjunctions and conjunctions, then it can easily seem that a deflated, 'thin' concept of truth is all we need. It might seem that linguistic deflationism brings conceptual deflationism in its train.

Accept for the moment that first-order uses of "true" can be handled in a deflationary way. From this it does not follow that we have done away with the

concept of truth. As we continue to reflect on or theorize about a language and its practitioners, we may turn to the speech-act of assertion. We may say, following Frege, that to assert is to put forward as true. Here is the word "true" again, appearing in the language in which we theorize.[23] In our mouth, the word "true" is not used as a disquotational or denominalizing or prosentential device. We are not even purporting to describe some sentence or thought. This is not a first-order use, and it cannot be disquoted away. Our use of the word is what we may call a *reflective* or *explanatory use*; it is made in the course of offering a general explanation of what speakers are *doing* when they use language in certain ways. We are not *calling* any specific sentence true, nor are we making oblique reference to some set of sentences and saying of its members that they are true. Rather, we are trying to identify a distinguishing feature of a class of *acts* – assertions (or in the mental case, judgments).

We should emphasize that the role we are assigning to the concept of truth is reserved for reflective, explanatory uses of "true." We do not take a stand on first-order uses of "true"; for the sake of argument, we are willing to accept a deflationary account of first-order uses. At the same time, we are not claiming that explanatory uses of "true" are the sole province of high-level theorizing about language. Reflective or explanatory uses of "true" need not be technical or recherché. For example, the claim that to assert is to present as true seems intuitive and natural enough.[24]

Our present focus is on uses of the concept of truth in contexts which do not involve *calling* something true. If Frege is right, truth is implicated in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered. For what is distinctly characteristic of acts of assertion is that they present a thought as true. So when we explain assertion, we ourselves use a truth-locution and employ the concept of truth. Thus, even if we grant, as does Frege, that first-order uses of "true" submit to the equivalence thesis, we may need to employ the concept of truth for explanatory purposes. As we have seen, Frege is not at all shy about using truth-locutions in an explanatory way in connection with assertion, logic and science. He does *not* accept a deflationary view of the *concept* of truth.

We can get at the same point by imagining a language which has no semantic vocabulary at all. A Fregean explanation of key phenomena of this language in terms of truth may still be in order. Speakers of the language, we may suppose, will make assertions, and we will want to explain what distinguishes a speaker's assertion that *p* from other speech-acts – wondering whether *p*, joking that *p*, and the rest. For Frege, as long as we have assertoric force, we have truth. An act of assertion puts forward a thought as true; assertions advance us from sense to reference, from the thought to the True. There is no understanding of what it is to assert without the notion of truth.[25]

It is worth emphasizing that the involvement of truth with assertion, on the Fregean story, does not emerge through the use of "true" to ascribe a property to a sentence, or a thought. If Frege is right, when we say that assertion is presenting as true, we are not ourselves describing a sentence or a thought a certain way – *by*

ascribing truth to it. The Fregean point is precisely that presenting as true (that is, asserting) is *not* a matter of ascribing a property to a sentence or thought, but rather is a special kind of *doing* or *act*, different from conjecturing, or surmising, or wondering, etc. Thus contrast:

> (i)   presenting the thought that *p as* true

with

> (ii)   presenting the thought that *p is* true.

The deflationist can claim that (ii) is equivalent to:

> (ii')   presenting the thought that *p*

since in (ii) "true" is applied to a particular thought. But it is not plausible to equate (i) with (ii'), for the familiar reason that presenting as true is just one way of presenting. In (i), "true" qualifies the kind of presenting at issue, not the thought presented. Frege's "presenting as true" is intended to characterize a class of acts that more often than not do not themselves involve calling something true; that is, Frege's explanandum is not primarily acts that involve first-order uses of "true." And explanatory uses of truth-locutions themselves do not involve appending "true" to a citation (direct or indirect) of a sentence or a thought. What implicates the concept of truth is our use of "presenting as true," which does not involve calling anything true, either.[26]

To sum up: even if "true" in its first-order uses is correctly treated by the linguistic deflationist, truth may nevertheless be a substantive concept, one that we invoke as we reflect on the nature of language use. If, like Frege, you are deflationist about first-order uses of "true" but you think asserting is presenting as true, you have not yet combined a truth-based account of assertion with a genuine form of conceptual deflationism.

III. Assertion as taking-true

Frege's lesson is this: you can be a deflationist about "true" (in its first-order uses) but not a deflationist about the concept of truth. But it is not clear where Frege stands on the metaphysical issue regarding truth. On the one hand, many of his remarks suggest that he thinks we get nowhere in our understanding of truth by pairing with the predicate "is true" some property that all and only true items share. On the other hand, Frege's talk of truth as "something primitive and simple" may suggest that he is reifying truth as a special, irreducible property. So some may argue that Frege's rejection of conceptual deflationism goes hand in hand with his attraction to metaphysical inflationism. However, next we will consider the view of a self-proclaimed deflationist, Robert Brandom, who is in our sense both a linguistic *and* a metaphysical deflationist,[27] but who is *not* – we will argue – a conceptual deflationist. Brandom's case will show us that Frege's lesson can be strengthened: you can be a deflationist about "true" *and* deny the existence of a property of truth, and still fail to be a deflationist about the concept of truth.

Throughout *Making It Explicit*, Brandom equates asserting with *taking-true* or *putting forward as true*; for example:

> Everyone ought to agree that asserting is putting forward a sentence as true. (Brandom 1994: 231)

> The attitude of taking-true is just that of acknowledging an assertional commitment…. A theory of asserting and assertional commitment is a theory of taking-true. (Brandom 1994: 202)

Of the claim or principle that a theory of asserting is a theory of taking-true, Brandom writes:

> this principle can be exploited according to two different orders of explanation: moving from a prior notion of truth to an understanding of asserting (or judging) as taking, treating, or putting forward *as* true, or moving from a notion of asserting to a notion of truth as what one is taking, treating, or putting forward a claim *as*. (Brandom 1994: 202)

Brandom rejects the former order of explanation, since he thinks it accords truth a more basic explanatory role than it deserves. Instead, Brandom endorses the latter way of exploiting the principle, that of "starting with an antecedent notion of assertional significance and then moving via that principle to an understanding of what is involved in talk of truth" (Brandom 1994: 232). Notice the shift here to "talk of truth." Frege has prepared us to be wary of this move to truth-talk – an account of "true," if it is confined to what we've called *first-order* uses, may tell us nothing about truth's involvement with assertion. So in what follows we will be interested not only in the adequacy of Brandom's treatment of the word "true"; we will also be interested in the relevance of that treatment to assertion.

We turn first to Brandom on "is true" and truth-talk. Brandom takes to heart the pragmatists' idea "that in calling something true, one is *doing* something, rather than, or in addition to, *saying* something" (Brandom 1994: 287). According to Brandom, the pragmatists are motivated by the special relation that exists between the force of an act of *taking as true* and the force of a straightforward assertion; see Brandom (1994: 288). Brandom makes the same observation as Frege: "In asserting "It is true that *p*", one asserts that *p*, and vice versa. The force or significance of the two claims is the same" (Brandom 1994: 288). Frege drew the conclusion that "true" cannot be the mark of assertion. Brandom draws a different conclusion: "true" *makes explicit* what is implicit in the act of assertion. When we assert "Aardvarks amble," we take it as true that aardvarks amble. When we assert "'Aardvarks amble' is true," we're asserting the same thing as before – but we're now making explicit our formerly implicit attitude of taking-true. Brandom writes:

> Semantic vocabulary is used merely as a convenient way of making explicit what is already implicit in the force or significance that attaches to the content of a speech act or attitude. (Brandom 1994: 82)

This is *not* to endorse illocutionary deflationism: Brandom is not claiming that predicating "true" of a proposition *introduces* or *produces* an assertion. It is just that what was already implicit is now made explicit; nothing new is added.

Now, according to Brandom, "true" is *force-redundant*. The assertion that *p* is true merely preserves the force of the assertion that *p*. As long as the truth locution is freestanding, and not, say, the antecedent of a conditional, force redundancy is a central phenomenon of truth-talk; see Brandom (1994: 299). But this, Brandom says, cannot be the whole story about "true." Recall Frege's observation: there are uses of truth locutions that are not assertoric – consider, for example, the locution "'Penguins waddle' is true" in the conditional "If 'Penguins waddle' is true, then penguins waddle." Brandom offers "a more general redundancy view that has the force redundancy of freestanding truth-takings as a consequence" (Brandom 1994: 299). This is the prosentential theory of truth, according to which "… is true" is a prosentence-forming operator.[28] Prosentences are analogous to pronouns: just as "She stopped" differs from "Mary stopped" in its explicit dependence on a token of "Mary" as its anaphoric antecedent, so the prosentence "'Penguins waddle' is true" differs from "Penguins waddle" in its dependence upon an antecedent (perhaps the token of "Penguins waddle" that it contains) – but there is no difference of semantic content between the prosentence and its anaphoric antecedent. According to the prosentential theory, truth locutions have the same semantic content as their antecedents whatever the context – whether, for example, they are freestanding or antecedents of conditionals. Moreover, according to Brandom, content-redundancy entails force-redundancy:

> … intersubstitutability of "it is true that *p*" and "*p*" in *all* occurrences, embedded or not, is sufficient to yield force redundancy in freestanding uses as a consequence. If two asserted contents are the same, then the significance of asserting them in the same pragmatic context should be the same. (Brandom 1994: 300)

This last claim of Brandom's seems correct: given content redundancy, force redundancy seems to follow. If "Aardvarks amble" and "'Aardvarks amble' is true" share the same content, then the force of uttering one in a given context will be the same as uttering the other in that same context. But then how can content-redundancy yield the kind of connection between "true" and assertoric force that Brandom is claiming? That is, how can it be maintained that "true" makes explicit what is already implicit in the force that attaches, specifically, to assertion? Suppose I *conjecture* that aardvarks amble. Given the content-redundancy of truth, and holding the context fixed, if we substitute "that 'Aardvarks amble' is true" for "that aardvarks amble," there will be no difference of force. The force will still be that associated with an act of conjecturing. But surely we should *not* now conclude that the addition of "is true" makes explicit what we are *doing* when we conjecture. That is, the use of "is true" here cannot be taken as signaling that we're putting *p* forward *with the force of a conjecture*. Given the prosentential account, "true" is content-redundant and force-redundant. But if that is so, then there can be no privileged connection between truth and

assertion, as Frege thought. We can no more say that "true" makes it explicit what we are doing when we are asserting than we can say that "true" makes it explicit what we are doing when we are cnjecturing or supposing or entertaining a thought. On a content-redundancy view such as prosententialism, there can be no general link between truth and force, and in particular no link between truth and assertoric force. The point generalizes to other deflationary accounts – for example, disquotationalism and minimalism. Given the claimed equivalence of "Aardvarks amble" and "'Aardvarks amble' is true" (or "Aardvarks amble" and "The proposition that aardvarks amble is true"), their intersubstitutability in a given pragmatic context will not affect the force in any way, whatever that force may be. Treated along these deflationary lines, the truth predicate is quite inert with respect to force, and it cannot function to make explicit what we are doing when we engage in this or that speech-act.

But this breaks the link that Brandom claims to exist between my assertional act of *taking-true* and the word "true." In endorsing the pragmatic force-based approach to truth for freestanding uses (as opposed, for example, to embedded uses in the antecedent of a conditional), Brandom writes:

> On the pragmatic line being considered, it is the practical significance or force of asserting that defines taking-true, and this sense of taking-true accounts for our use of "true". (Brandom 1994: 297-8)

But if uses of "true" are accounted for along prosentential lines, then those uses cannot be explained in terms of *taking-true*. For the prosententialist, "true" is content-redundant, and thereby force-redundant. So the word "true" has no link to assertoric force, or any other kind of force. And in the other direction, a prosentential account of "true" has no tendency to provide a deflationary understanding of *truth-taking*. (Indeed, as we shall see below, Brandom's own account of truth-taking is far from deflationary.) Again, we should heed Frege warning not to assume too quickly that a deflationary account of "true" will bear on truth's involvement with assertion. Deflationary accounts of first-order uses of "true" will have the result that to conjecture that p is true is to do no more than to conjecture that p, to wonder whether p is true is to do nothing other than to wonder whether p, and so on for the various available illocutionary forces. Content redundancy brings force-redundancy in its train. But this does nothing to address the explanatory claim that links assertoric force, specifically, to presenting as true (or to Brandom's own taking-true). To deflate *that* claim it is not enough to be able to substitute "p" for "p is true." We need to be able to substitute "presenting" for "presenting as true" in our explanation, and we need to be able to substitute "taking" for "taking true." And we have argued that deflationary treatments of "is true" have not shown us how to do that. Thus, we may accept that the verbal separation of sentences or thoughts into the "true" ones and the rest is not a substantial separation that aims to identify some common feature shared by all and only items falling under "true." For all that, it may still be the case – and indeed we've argued that it is the case – that the separation of acts into truth presentings and the rest, or the separation of attitudes into truth takings and the rest, *is* a substantial one.[29]

So let us now turn to the attitude of *truth-taking* or *taking as true*. Even if the prosentential theory of the word "true" is correct – indeed, even if we can eliminate altogether all first-order uses of the word "true" from the language – still the notion of *taking as true* remains, and with it the concept of truth. In Brandom's phrase, truth here is "what one is taking, treating, or putting forward a claim *as*" (Brandom 1994: 202) when one asserts. At this point, then, the deflationist needs a suitably deflationary account of *taking as true* and the associated concept of truth.

But this is not something that Brandom provides. Brandom is dismissive of an inflated respect for truth – but truth-taking is an altogether different matter:

> Talk about the cardinal importance of concern with truth is a dispensable façon de parler. What actually matters is the pragmatic attitude of *taking*-true or putting forward as true, that is, judging or asserting. (Brandom 1994: 82)

Here, as in many other places, Brandom identifies taking-true with asserting – and so Brandom's account of asserting is at the same time an account of taking-true or putting forward as true (recall Brandom's remark that a theory of asserting is a theory of taking-true). And this theory of asserting or taking-true is *not* a deflationary one. What are we doing when we assert or put forward a sentence as true? Brandom's general answer is that we are undertaking a certain kind of commitment. The commitment may be expressed in terms of the Sellarsian notion of the practice of giving and asking for reasons:

> The kind of commitment that a claim of the assertional sort is an expression of is something that can stand in need of (and so be liable to the demand for) a reason; and it is something that can be offered as a reason. (Brandom 1994: 167)

It is a necessary condition of assertional commitments that they play the dual role of justifier and subject of demand for justification; assertions "are fundamentally fodder for *inferences*" (Brandom 1994: 168). Brandom's account of asserting or taking as true goes forward in terms of commitments, inferences, entitlements, justificatory responsibilities – clearly this is not a deflationary account of *taking-true*.

There is a *phenomenalist* aspect to Brandom's account; see Brandom (1994: 291ff.). Brandom explicitly rejects a metaphysical account of truth, and instead aims for a phenomenalistic understanding of truth. We are to start not with truth, but with *takings*-true (just as a phenomenalist might start not with what is represented but with representings of it). This strategy may lead to the rejection of any metaphysically robust *property* of truth serving as the extension of "true" in its ordinary first-order uses. But it does not permit us to dispense with the *concept* of truth altogether. That concept still figures in. Taking-true is a distinctive attitude, a special kind of taking; presenting as true is a special kind of presenting. And our use of "true" in these locutions indicates what it is that is distinctive about this kind of presenting. Truth is what we take or present a claim *as* when we assert, whether or not we think that truth is a special feature shared by all true

claims. Truth is thus bound up with the attitude of taking as true – and we've seen that Brandom's treatment of that attitude is far from deflationary.

Brandom may lay claim to metaphysical deflationism, and to a prosententialist deflationism about "true," but for all that he is *not* a conceptual deflationist.[30] As a theorist of language, he still needs to invoke the concept of truth to explain certain of our linguistic doings, even if there is no substantive property of truth shared by all and only things we (properly) call true, and even if the word "true" in its first-order uses is redundant. Put together Brandom's metaphysical deflationism and his redundancy account of "true," and you still won't have enough to break the conceptual connections between assertion and truth, or to deflate the concept of truth.

In treating truth phenomenalistically, Brandom does not free himself of the concept of truth – indeed, neither does he free himself of the word "true." For what are we to make of the occurrences of "true" in such locutions as "to assert is to take as true or to put forward as true"? As we suggested earlier, in locutions like these we are making *explanatory* uses of "true," as opposed to *first-order* uses. These explanatory uses cannot be treated along prosentential lines. Here "true" is not a prosentence-forming operator, and there is no anaphoric antecedent. In claiming that to assert *p* is to put forward *p* as true, we say something about the *act of asserting* a sentence; we do not explicitly or obliquely call some antecedent sentence true. Brandom does acknowledge that there are uses of the truth-predicate that his theory cannot handle. As examples, he cites uses of the substantive "truth," as in "Truth is one, but beliefs are many" and "Truth is a property definable in the language of some eventual physics" (Brandom 1994: 323). But these uses of "true," Brandom argues, are the result of a mistake: a false analogy is drawn between "true" and ordinary predicates, with the result that a property of truth is hypostatized. Brandom writes: "It is no defect in the anaphoric account not to generate readings of the fundamentally confused remarks that result" (Brandom 1994: 324). But the anaphoric account does not generate a reading of "When we assert *p* we put forward *p* as true," and Brandom surely will not regard *this* claim as confused.

Is there a way of maintaining both Brandom's account of assertion and conceptual deflationism? One option would be to deny that *taking-true* or *putting forward as true* have any connection to truth. But this seems at best implausible and at worst contradictory. It is clear that Brandom himself does not endorse this option. He shares the pragmatist's commitment to phenomenalism about truth, that "once one understands what it is to take or treat something as true, one will have understood as well the concept of truth" (Brandom 1994: 291); being true "is to be understood as being *properly* taken-true" (Brandom 1994: 291).[31] It is clear that Brandom seeks an account of truth – a pragmatic account that proceeds from the attitude of taking-true. There is no getting rid of the concept of truth: it is one of Brandom's explananda. This point is reinforced by Brandom's treatment of assertion and knowledge. According to Brandom, "assertions have the default status and significance of implicit knowledge claims" (Brandom 1994: 201). Consequently, says Brandom, some account must be given of the truth condition

on knowledge. The question then is: "What is the social-deontic attitude corresponding to the truth condition on attributions of knowledge?" (Brandom 1994: 202). The aim is not to deflate truth, but to explain truth's connection to knowledge within the pragmatic framework of commitments and entitlements.[32] This project, we have argued, is quite distinct from that of providing a deflationary account of "true."

Brandom's pragmatic project could be seen as similar in some ways to that of the ethical noncognitivists who tries to explain our use of an ethical term such as "good." The noncognitivist wants to explain ethical discourse without invoking a substantive property of goodness – a worldly feature (whether irreducibly moral or reducible to some natural feature or features). Toward that end, the noncognitivist might invoke a human attitude of 'taking-to-be-good' as the more basic explanatory notion, in terms of which our moral attitudes and behavior, as well as aspects of our moral discourse (such as our calling things good) may be explained. The noncognitivist may further try to *reduce* the attitude of taking-to-be-good to some other psychological attitudes or propensities. But if she were to do so, it doesn't seem to us that this would amount to a 'conceptual deflation' of the notion of goodness, or of taking-to-be-good. For the noncognitivist's reductive success might itself serve to reveal the richness of the relevant notions, and their connections to other ones in our conceptual scheme. (If the concept of goodness were merely a 'thin' concept, whose understanding is exhausted by its mastery as a purely formal or grammatical device, the noncognitivist reductive or reconstructive task would be a very easy one indeed![33])

Another option open to the conceptual deflationist is to embrace Brandom's account of assertion – the pragmatic account of assertion that proceeds in terms of commitments, entitlements, inferences, and social-deontic attitudes – and bypass any identification of assertion with taking-true. The idea is that if we take the account this way, we have an account of assertion that is entirely independent of truth. Since truth makes no appearance, the account may seem to be compatible with conceptual deflationism. However, there are at least three problems with this option. First, it may be objected that this is a purely verbal maneuver. We can withhold the claim that to assert is to take as true. But withholding the claim does not make it false. Perhaps all we have really done is to reconstruct in pragmatic terms the notion of taking-true under a different name, under the name of assertion. At issue isn't the word "true," but an allegedly explanatory notion that we invoke using that word in certain claims about the use of language. Second, even if assertion is pulled apart from notions like *taking-true*, *putting forward as true*, *presenting as true*, those notions still stand in need of explanation. What is it to put forward a proposition as true? It seems for all the world that this is the speech-act of assertion. But suppose it isn't. Then it is a distinct speech-act that is characterized in terms of truth. And, as we have seen, truth's involvement in *taking-true* or *putting forward as true* is not explained by a deflationary account of the (first-order uses) of the word "true." As long as we need the concept of truth to explain certain speech-acts, we must reject conceptual deflationism.

Third, consider Brandom's account of assertion taken in a way that bypasses truth altogether. According to this pragmatic account, when I assert that aardvarks amble I take on certain commitments and responsibilities. But what is it about the act of asserting that generates these inferential commitments and justificatory responsibilities? Why are they not generated when I suppose, conjecture, or ask a question? The answer seems obvious: it's because when I assert that aardvarks amble, I'm putting forward that proposition *as true*, as the way things are. I'm not putting it forward as something to be assumed for the sake of argument, or as something to be questioned, or as something that is possible – I'm putting it forward as true. This is what distinguishes assertion from other speech-acts, and this is what generates the commitments and responsibilities identified by the pragmatic account. It is no accident that taking-true and its cognates figure so centrally in Brandom's account. We cannot make proper sense of the pragmatic account of assertion without appreciating the role that the concept of truth plays in our understanding of assertoric force.

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In our introduction we cited Williams' claim that, according to deflationary views, the function of truth talk is "*wholly* expressive, never *explanatory*" Williams (1999: 547). If our argument against conceptual deflationism is right, then truth-talk *does* have an explanatory function, *contra* the deflationist. It is not the case that the distinctive function of "true" is only to allow us "to endorse or reject sentences (or propositions) that we cannot simply assert" Williams (1999: 547).

We conclude that a thorough-going deflationism is incompatible with an adequate account of assertion. This is not to say that we must abandon a deflationary account of the word "true" – Frege holds out the possibility that we can explain assertion while endorsing linguistic deflationism (for first-order uses of "true"). And it is not to say that we must abandon metaphysical deflationism – Brandom provides a rich account of assertion in terms of truth-taking while maintaining both metaphysical and linguistic deflationism. But it is to say that we must abandon conceptual deflationism. Perhaps there is no robust property of truth, and perhaps first-order uses of "true" are redundant, but if we are to understand what we do when we assert, we cannot dispense with the concept of truth.[34]

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[1] Williams (1999: 547), emphasis in the original.

[2] See Bar-On, Horisk and Lycan (2000).

[3] See Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994).

[4] This "fact about truth" is considered by Horwich (1990: 23-4).

[5] The phrase is Horwich's; see Horwich (1990: 22f.).

[6] Horwich (1990: 26; original italics).

[7] See Horwich (1990: 24).

[8] See Quine (1970: 12).

[9] For example, see Leeds (1978: 120-1 and n. 10), Field (1986: 58), Resnik (1990: 412), and David (1994: 107 and Ch. 4).

[10] See Field (1999: 369).

[11] "Truth, to coin a phrase, isn't a real predicate" (Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975: 97).

[12] Hill (2002: 3-4) recommends a version of minimalism, and regards deflationism in general as a view that "truth is philosophically and empirically neutral, in the sense that its use carries no substantive philosophical or empirical commitments."

[13] For influential contemporary versions of ethical noncognitivism, see, for example, Blackburn (1993) and Gibbard (1990). It could be argued that Ayer, an early and well-known proponent of emotivism, did have hopes of 'deflating' the concept of goodness (and other ethical concepts). But Ayer's version of ethical noncognitivism is notoriously riddled with difficulties, in good part because of its failure to do justice to the role played by ethical concepts in our conceptual scheme. (Ram Neta has drawn our attention to a view of Geach's (1956) according to which "good" is merely a grammatical device – a predicate modifier – which does not represent a substantive concept.)

[14] The emphasis is Frege's. Frege says the same thing at a number of places. For example: "Once we have grasped a thought, we can recognize it as true (*make a judgement*) and give expression to our recognition of its truth (*make an assertion*)" (Frege 1979: 185).

[15] "The logician does not have to bother with mock thoughts, just as a physicist, who sets out to investigate thunder, will not pay any attention to stage-thunder" (Frege 1979: 130).

[16] Dummett also urges a conceptual connection between assertion and truth, but stresses the reverse direction: "Without doubt, the source of the concept [of truth] lies in our general conception of the linguistic practice of assertion" (Dummett 1991: 165).

[17] We have expressed the claim here in terms of presenting a thought as true – but one could equally well put the claim in terms of presenting a sentence as true, or a proposition as true.

[18] We owe this suggestion to Dean Pettit.

[19] Even if one *can* present ambling aardvarks in the absence of ambling aardvarks (perhaps via some form of 'deferred ostension'), there is still the problem of identifying what has been conveyed in this way: is it the *general* claim that aardvarks amble or the *particular* claim that there are some ambling aardvarks about? There is also a question how to regard particular claims such as "Asserting that aardvarks amble is presenting aardvarks as ambling" and "Asserting that penguins waddle is presenting penguins as waddling," and so on, as instances of the general claim "To assert that *p* is to present *p* as true", since the particular claims are not the result of any suitable substitution for *p*.

[20] Strawson's variant of the redundancy theory identifies a performative role for "true": we use "true" to perform speech-acts such as endorsing, agreeing, and conceding, as well as asserting. See Strawson (1950).

[21] See for example Frege (1956) in Blackburn and Simmons (1999: 88): "… the sentence 'I smell the scent of violets' has just the same content as the sentence 'It is true that I smell the scent of violets.'"

[22] Greimann's article provides an excellent discussion of Frege on the expressive, illocutionary, cognitive and explanatory functions of truth.

[23] In a similar vein, Dummett (1991: 167), remarking on the explanatory role of the concept of truth, has suggested that truth belongs with "second-level concepts, used to comment on our employment of our language."

[24] Ted Parent has pointed out to us that, if one endorses a deflationary account of first-order uses of "true" and accepts our claim that reflective or theoretical uses cannot be deflated, one may have to opt for a non-uniform account of the truth-locutions for any language that permits both types of uses. This raises issues that go beyond the scope of this paper. We are here only concerned to argue that *even if* we were to accept a deflationary treatment of first-order uses of "true," we would still have reason to reject conceptual deflationism.

[25] A similar point can be made about the link between truth and meaning via the notion of truth-conditions. For an argument that any explanation of meaning requires appeal to truth-conditions, and a discussion of the issues this raises for a deflationist, see Bar-On, Horisk, and Lycan (2000). Dummett has famously argued that a deflationist about truth *cannot* appeal to the notion of truth-conditions in explaining meaning. For an early statement, see Dummett's "Truth" in Dummett (1978: 7). Patterson (2003) argues that deflationism can be sanguine about the explanatory role of truth-conditions, as long as the deflationist account is confined to the role of "true" in the *object language*. He argues, however, that Dummett is right about the incompatibility of a truth-conditional account with what he calls "metalanguage deflationism". While we find Patterson's overall line congenial, we think his main point is better understood in terms of our distinction between first-order uses and explanatory uses of truth-locutions.

[26] We thank Matthew Chrisman and Thomas Hofweber for remarks that have prompted this clarification. We should distinguish the schematic form *φ-ing the thought that p is true* and *φ-ing the thought that p as true*, where *φ* stands for a speech-act. The former is arguably equivalent to *φ-ing the thought that p*. But, in sharp contrast, the status of the latter seems to shift according to the value of *φ*. Although we won't pursue it here, for some values the result is nonsensical (consider *questioning whether the thought that p as true*). For other values, the result is the speciation of a genus – in particular, this is so for the cases of interest to us, *presenting as true* or *taking as true*. It is less clear to us whether there are well-formed values that are equivalent to *φ-ing the thought that p*.

[27] See e.g. Brandom (1994: Ch. 5, V, section 2), entitled "Semantic Deflationism." Brandom's linguistic deflationism takes the form of prosententialism, and he explicitly denies that there is a property of truth; see, for example, Brandom (1994: 325).

[28] Brandom departs from the original prosentential theory, according to which "… is true" is a syncategorematic fragment of a semantically atomic generic prosentence 'that is true'; see Brandom (1994: 305).

[29] This goes back to the point of clarification offered toward the end of section II.

[30] Brandom does not claim to be a conceptual deflationist – but then he does not separate it off from other forms of deflationism in the way that we have. His willingness to place the notion of taking as true and its cognates in so central a position might suggest that he would reject conceptual deflationism; on the other hand he embraces deflationism without any apparent reservation. Brandom interpretation aside, we are urging that Brandom's account of assertion is incompatible with conceptual deflationism.

[31] Brandom writes: "Being true is then to be understood as being properly taken-true (believed). It is this idea that is built on here, jettisoning the details of the classical pragmatist

account of belief or taking-true, and substituting for it the account of assertion and doxastic discursive commitment introduced in Chapter 3." (Brandom (1994: 291).

[32] Brandom also ties truth to other notions, for example *successful action*; see Brandom (1994: 527-29).

[33] But see footnote 1.

[34] We wish to thank Matthew Chrisman, Thomas Hofweber, Ted Parent, and Dean Pettit for reading a draft of the paper and providing very helpful comments.

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