

## **DEFLATIONISM AND THE NORMATIVITY OF TRUTH**

Deflationist theories of truth, some critics have argued, fail to account for the normativity of truth. This is one of the more promising, if also more elusive, objections to deflationism. Here I will consider and answer a recent version of this objection offered by Huw Price (1998), which builds upon a version offered by Crispin Wright (1992).

### **I. Price's Anti-Deflationist Argument**

Price defines deflationism as a pair of claims: (i) that truth is not a substantial property; and (ii) that the key to our use of the concept of truth lies in its disquotational character – in the fact that

(DS) 'p' is true iff p

holds for all central declarative sentences. He then argues that, although deflationism can accommodate two important normative principles about assertion, it cannot accommodate a third. These principles are

(Subjective) One is incorrect to assert that p if one does not believe that p.

(Objective) One is incorrect to assert that p if, though one believes that p, one does not have adequate grounds for believing that p.

(Hyper-objective) One is incorrect to assert that p if, in fact, it is not the case that p.<sup>1</sup>

About the principle of hyper-objective assertibility, he asks:

Why can't [deflationism account for the existence of this third norm]? Simply because as a grammatical device, the truth predicate would have the same kind of use in an assertoric practice which lacked this third norm. (249)

By way of justification of this claim, Price asks us to imagine a community of speakers who criticize assertions for flouting the principles of subjective assertibility and objective assertibility

but not for flouting that of hyper-objective assertibility. These speakers “express their beliefs – i.e., the kind of behavioral dispositions which we would characterize as beliefs – by means of a speech act we might call merely opinionated assertion.” (247). They criticize one another for making insincere or inadequately justified assertions, but not for asserting what’s false. We can also imagine these speakers being fully competent in using a disquotational truth predicate, and so in applying the deflationist truth concept (248). They fully understand the deflationist truth concept, then, but not the concept of truth. Thus, the former can’t be the same as the latter.

What is the scope of this objection? To borrow a phrase from Price, if the objection should turn out to undermine only deflationism about sentential truth (i.e., about truth for sentences), and not deflationism about propositional truth (truth for propositions), he will have “won the battle against deflationism but not the war.” Deflationists could still retreat to the safe haven of propositions. Some deflationists have already made this retreat for independent reasons. Examining Price’s argument, though, we can see that nothing essential to it depends on disquotation in particular. We could just as well imagine speakers who, while competent in using a “denominalizing” truth predicate of propositions, and so competent with the deflationist concept of propositional truth, still fail to recognize a hyper-objective norm over assertion. Price’s objection is therefore potentially more damaging than some anti-deflationist objections in the literature.<sup>2</sup> All deflationist truth concepts seem to be in the same boat. This is how Wright, before Price, saw the dialectical situation. And it seems to be how Price sees it, too.<sup>3</sup>

I will defend deflationism about propositional truth against Price’s objection. The defense I offer may be adapted, with appropriate changes, by a defender of deflationism about sentential truth, at least if such deflationism has the resources to explain certain basic facts about the

relation between meaning and truth-conditions. I reserve discussion of this rather complex dialectical situation for the final section of the paper.

The form of deflationism about propositional truth that I will defend is Horwich's (1990), which is centered on the equivalence schema (E) ('<p>' abbreviates 'the proposition that p'):

(E) <p> is true iff p.

Replacing (DS) with (E) enables one to avoid certain logical difficulties, unrelated to Price's argument, stemming from the fact that the instances of (DS) express a posteriori contingent facts. Using (E) in place of (DS), we may deduce  $\zeta(\langle p \rangle \text{ is true})$  from  $\zeta(p)$  for a wide variety of non-extensional contexts  $\zeta(\dots)$ . For example, whereas "S has reason to believe that 'p' is true" and 'S has reason to believe that p' are not validly interderivable, 'S has reason to believe that <p> is true' and 'S has reason to believe that p' are.

Recall Price's definition of deflationism in terms of claims (i) and (ii). In our current setting, (ii) may be reformulated so: the key to the concept of (propositional) truth lies in its denominalizing character, in the fact that (E) holds for all central declarative sentences. Now if we are to evaluate Price's anti-deflationist argument, we must have a good grasp of what the intuitive claims (i) and (ii) amount to. Of course, deflationists differ on how precisely to interpret the claims. Since we are concerned with Horwich-style deflationism, let us ask what claims (i) and (ii) amount to within that framework.

First, some terminology. Following Horwich, let us identify the deflationist theory of truth with the totality of propositions expressed by non-pathological instances of (E).<sup>4</sup> And let us identify deflationism about truth – or to use Horwich's terminology, the deflationist conception of truth – with the claim that the deflationist theory of truth is adequate. (1990, 7) To say a theory of truth is adequate is to say that it is the simplest theory on the basis of which it is

possible to explain all the facts about truth, given facts about phenomena other than truth.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for the Horwich-style deflationist, (ii) – when understood correctly – amounts to the assertion of deflationism about truth. Given this reading of (ii), (ii) appears to insure (i), i.e., the claim that truth is insubstantial, or at least it insures the claim given a Horwichian reading of ‘insubstantial’. How so? As I understand Horwich, a property is insubstantial iff, (a) fails to admit of analysis, either philosophical or empirical, but (b) facts about it can be explained by reference to a simple principle. A property F-ness fails to admit of analysis, moreover, just in case there is no theory providing non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions of the form ‘Something is F iff it is G’, which is an adequate theory of F-ness.<sup>6</sup> The argument from (ii) to (i) is as follows. Suppose (ii) holds; i.e., the deflationist theory is adequate. Then the facts about truth can be explained by reference to a simple principle, viz. (E), which is not an analysis. This insures not only (b) but also (a).<sup>7</sup> Thus, (i) holds.

With Horwich-style deflationism in mind, then, let us return to Price. Price’s thought experiment, in effect, poses the question of whether a community employing a deflationary truth-predicate thereby commits itself to accepting the principle of hyper-objective assertibility (henceforth HOA):

(HOA) One is incorrect to assert that p if not-p.

His answer is no. Nevertheless, he thinks this argument does not generalize to the principles of subjective and objective assertibility. That is to say, thought experiments about a community using a truth predicate competently but in which the principles of objective (subjective) assertibility aren’t recognized don’t show that deflationism fails to accommodate those normative principles. Why the difference? Why can’t we imagine a community of speakers, competent with the deflationist’s denominalizing truth-predicate and with the deflationist truth

concept it expresses, who nonetheless disregard objective assertibility? They wouldn't criticize one another for making assertions in the absence of evidence. Price's answer: the principles of subjective and objective assertibility do not state norms of truth (245); (HOA) does. The deflationist needn't say anything, therefore, about why any genuine assertoric practice must adhere to norms of subjective and objective assertibility – that is a job for one's theories of assertion, belief, and evidence. She must say something, however, about why any genuine assertoric practice must adhere to (HOA), for that is a norm of truth. She cannot discharge her explanatory task by saying, as Horwich says to Wright, that deflationists have never denied the existence of such a norm.<sup>8</sup> For Price, the deflationist must explain this norm on the basis of the deflationist theory; otherwise the theory is inadequate.

What is going on here? Consider how deflationist explanations of facts about truth proceed in a Horwich-style framework. One formulates a fact about truth that needs to be explained, '...<p> is true...' One then derives the sentence expressing the fact as follows:

(i)	<p> is true iff p (and obviously and necessarily so)	From the deflationist theory <sup>9</sup>
(ii)	...p...	Truth-free fact
(iii)	...<p> is true...	i, ii

As an example, consider the norm of objective assertibility. Corresponding to this norm is a norm that can be formulated using the truth predicate, viz.

(OA-T) One is incorrect to assert that p if one does not have adequate grounds for believing that <p> is true.

The above norm is then explainable as follows:

(1)	<p> is true iff p, and obviously and necessarily so.	From the deflationist theory
(2)	One is incorrect to assert that p if one does not have adequate grounds for believing that p	Truth-free fact
(3)	One is incorrect to assert that p if one does not have adequate grounds for believing that <p> is true.	1, 2

Here (2) is the principle of objective assertibility and (3) is (OA-T).<sup>10 11</sup> We can then explain the truth-involving correlate of (HOA)

(HOA-T) One is incorrect to assert that p if <p> is not true.

as follows:

- |     |   |                              |
|-----|---|------------------------------|
| (4) | <p> is true iff p, and obviously and necessarily so.  | From the deflationist theory |
| (5) | <u>One is incorrect to assert that p if not-p.</u>    | Truth-free fact(?)           |
| (6) | One is incorrect to assert that p if <p> is not true. | 4,5                          |

Here (5) is (HOA) and (6) is (HOA-T).

These derivations explain the truth-involving correlates of the principles in question, but they do not explain those principles themselves. This needn't necessarily trouble the deflationist, though, for she is charged with the responsibility of showing only how her theory is sufficient to explain facts about truth, not how it is sufficient to explain facts about other phenomena.

However, if a principle such as (HOA), contrary to appearances, does state a fact about truth, then perhaps the deflationist ought to be troubled.

The question, then, is whether (HOA) – (5) above – states a fact about truth or not (i.e., whether it states a norm of truth). I will argue that deflationists are in the clear in either case. If (HOA) doesn't state a fact about truth, then the deflationist doesn't need to explain it.<sup>12</sup> (If it doesn't state a fact about truth, it doesn't state a norm of truth. The norm of truth, presumably, would be stated rather by (HOA-T), i.e., (6), which the deflationist could then explain by appealing to (4) and (5).) On the other hand, if (HOA) states a fact about truth, then the deflationist can still explain it.

We will see, in the course of our discussion, that (HOA) states a fact at all only if it is restricted in certain ways. Still, my argument will be that whether (HOA), suitably restricted, states a fact that is about truth or a fact that isn't about truth, deflationists are in the clear.

## II. A Response to Price

(HOA) doesn't even contain an occurrence of 'true', 'is the case', 'holds', etc. How, then, could it state a fact about truth?<sup>13</sup> It is not unproblematic to determine whether a fact is about (involves) a particular property. However, I think we are safe to assume that (HOA) states a fact about truth only if either (i) truth just is correctness of assertion, so that a fact about correctness of assertion is ipso facto a fact about truth, or (ii), although truth isn't simply correctness of assertion, the latter presupposes the former. I will investigate both possibilities.

At first blush, it seems that if the first possibility obtains, the deflationist would be in trouble. The most natural way to understand the claim that truth "just is" correctness of assertion is as equivalent to the claim that truth is analyzable or definable as correctness of assertion. If this is right, then it appears that (HOA) states a basic fact about truth that the deflationist cannot explain, but which is also not contained within the deflationist theory itself. The best the deflationist could do would be to explain (HOA) (i.e., (9)) as follows:

- |     |  |                              |
|-----|--|------------------------------|
| (7) | <p> is true iff p  | From the deflationist theory |
| (8) | <u>One is incorrect to assert &lt;p&gt; if &lt;p&gt; is not true</u> | ?                            |
| (9) | One is incorrect to assert <p> if not-p                              | 7, 8.                        |

The problem is that the deflationist needs (9) to explain (8), since (8) states a fact about truth.

The deflationist cannot explain (8) by claiming that it follows from the fact that truth is definable as correctness of assertion. For then she would be admitting that there are facts about truth that cannot be explained on the basis of her simple principle (E) but can only be explained by further assumptions about truth. So it seems that the deflationist must explain (9) using (8), and vice versa, with the result that her attempted explanations run in a circle, and (9) is not genuinely explained.<sup>14</sup>

Even though things look bad for the deflationist on the assumption that truth just is correctness of assertion, I doubt they would be so bad. The deflationist has a simple fix. She may say to us: “all right, truth just is correctness of assertion, but I will offer a deflationist account of correctness of assertion, consisting of the totality of propositions expressed by non-pathological instances of ‘<p> is correct to assert iff p’; I claim that this theory is adequate.” This deflationist would then explain the central facts about truth expressed by the schema (E), e.g., the fact that <snow is white> is true iff snow is white, in the following fashion:

(10) <p> is true iff <p> is correct to assert	Given that truth is correctness of assertion
(11) <p> is correct to assert iff p	From the deflationist theory of correctness of assertion
(12) <p> is true iff p	10, 11

Now let me stress: the sort of deflationism about correct assertion that I have just mentioned is not a redundancy theory, it’s a Horwichian theory. Just as a Horwichian deflationist about truth doesn’t claim that ‘true’ makes no contribution to the meaning of ‘it is true that p’, a Horwichian deflationist about correctness of assertion doesn’t hold that ‘correct’ and ‘assert’ make no contribution to the meaning of ‘it is correct to assert that p’. She thinks, rather, that the deflationist theory of correctness of assertion is adequate, i.e., that it is the simplest theory on the basis of which all the facts about correctness of assertion can be explained.

There is a general moral in the offing here. Any theory of truth according to which truth consists in a unitary property F-ness, whether F-ness is normative or not, only pushes back the problem of accounting for facts of the form <<p> is true iff p>. If one asserts that truth consists in F-ness, then one must account for facts of the form <<p> is F iff p> in order to be able to account for those of the form <<p> is true iff p>. One might, in turn, take F-ness to consist in G-ness. But, clearly, such analyses must give out at some point, and at that point it is hard to see how one couldn’t take a sort of deflationist line about the ultimate property in the chain of



analyses. So, supposing that truth just is correctness of assertion and that correctness of assertion isn't analyzable as consisting in some further property, one must then take up a deflationist stance about correctness of assertion.<sup>15</sup>

However, this discussion is moot, since truth isn't simply correctness of assertion. The notions aren't even extensionally equivalent. Consider the proposition

(13) I am not asserting anything.

in light of my current silence. It is incorrect for me to assert (13), and the source of this incorrectness isn't to be found with subjective or objective assertibility; after all, I believe (13) and I have good grounds for believing it. Nor is the problem solved by invoking additional specially designed non-hyper-objective principles of assertibility such as (14), (15), (16), or (17)

(14) One is incorrect to assert that p if, were one to assert that p, one would not believe that p.

(15) One is incorrect to assert that p if, were one to assert that p, one would not have good reason to believe that p.

(16) One is incorrect to assert that p if one believes that were one to assert that p, it would be that not-p.

(17) One is incorrect to assert that p if one has good evidence that, were one to assert that p, it would be that not-p.

The problem with (14) and (15) is that we can imagine situations in which the following holds: if I were to assert that I was not asserting anything, I would still believe (have good reason to believe) that I was not asserting anything. Perhaps a wizard is standing by to make sure this is so (let the wizard be prepared to modify my experiential and memory states so that, should I assert that I am not asserting anything, I'll believe that it was someone other than I who made the assertion). Even (16) and (17) miss the core phenomenon, though it is harder to think of counterexamples. Someone who asserts (13) but who, for some reason, doesn't believe that, were he to assert (13), (13) would be false, would still be incorrect to assert (13). Mutatis mutandis for (17).<sup>16</sup>

I submit that it is hyper-objectively incorrect for me to assert (13), and not merely subjectively or objectively incorrect, and not merely incorrect in virtue of the violation of principles of the likes of (14) – (17). There is a kind of incorrectness of assertion attaching to (13) that consists merely in the fact that asserting (13) makes it false. Even so, (13) is true. Thus, to be true is not to be hyper-objectively correct to assert.<sup>17 18</sup>

The possibility remains that correctness of assertion presupposes truth. If it does, then (HOA) states a fact about truth that the deflationist ought to explain. How might correctness of assertion presuppose truth? A notion (or property) A presupposes a notion (or property) B just in case A can be explained in terms of B, i.e., just in case A is definable in terms of B.

One simple way in which correctness of assertion might presuppose truth is by being definable by a conjunction including truth as a conjunct, even if correctness of assertion is definable as truth (which it cannot be, since the two notions aren't extensionally equivalent). However, we can see that truth can't figure in such a definition as a simple conjunct, in light of considerations similar to those touched upon in our discussion of 'I am not asserting anything'. Consider the proposition (18)

(18) I am asserting something.

It is (hyper-objectively) correct for me to assert (18) right now, even though it is not true.<sup>19</sup>

What makes (18) correct to assert is the fact that asserting it makes it true. Thus, correctness of assertion doesn't entail truth, and so isn't definable in terms of a conjunction including truth.

(18) also shows that (HOA) requires restriction if it is to state a fact at all. Perhaps by tailoring a definition of correctness of assertion to fit cases like (13) and (18), we can provide in one stroke an explanation of how correctness of assertion might presuppose truth and a suitable restriction of (HOA). Here is one natural proposal:

(Def) P is correct for S to assert  $\equiv_{df}$  were S to assert P, P would be true.

(New HOA) One is incorrect to assert that p if it's not the case that, were one to assert that p, it would be that p.

One might worry that the conditional fallacy tarnishes (Def). Suppose  $\langle p \rangle$  meets these conditions: (i) it is false, (ii) it is not at all about assertion, and (iii) asserting it wouldn't make it true. Consistently with these conditions, we may suppose that were S to assert  $\langle p \rangle$ , it would be true. Perhaps our wizard is prepared to insure the truth of  $\langle p \rangle$  if S should assert  $\langle p \rangle$ . Even so, we would be loath to say that it is correct for S to assert  $\langle p \rangle$ . What would make  $\langle p \rangle$  true wouldn't be just the assertion of it, but the assertion together with facts about the wizard's intentions and magical techniques.

To avoid such problems we might replace (Def) with

It is correct for S to assert P  $\equiv_{df}$  either P is true and S's asserting P wouldn't (all by itself) make P false, or P is false but S's asserting P would (all by itself) make P true.

and then reformulate (New HOA) accordingly. Making this adjustment, or further adjustments in the same spirit, would not affect our argument, as I will now explain.

Suppose (Def) is correct. Could the deflationist then explain (New HOA)? Yes:

- |      |  |                              |
|------|--|------------------------------|
| (19) | $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p, and obviously and necessarily so.   | From the deflationist theory |
| (20) | One is incorrect to assert that p if it's not the case that, were one to assert that p, $\langle p \rangle$ would be true. | From (Def)                   |
| (21) | One is incorrect to assert that p if it's not the case that, were one to assert that p, it would be that p.                | (19) – (20)                  |

The deflationist may employ (20) here, since it follows from the definition of correctness of assertion (i.e., from the biconditional corresponding to that definition). It is clear that if we replaced (Def) with another definition, such as the one considered above, the basic structure of (19) – (21) would remain intact. In whatever way we modify (20), (21) (i.e., (New HOA) would be modified similarly, and the modified (21) would follow from (19) together with the similarly modified (20). (The logical move from (20) to (21) is, after all, simply denominalization.)

Moreover, the deflationist would be eligible to employ the modified (20) if indeed it were grounded in the definition of correctness of assertion. Thus, we may assume, without loss of generality, that if correctness of assertion presupposes truth, it does so in virtue of the fact that (Def) defines correctness of assertion.

Nevertheless, one might object: doesn't (20), or any suitable modification of it, state a fact about truth, one that therefore must be explained by the deflationist theory rather than by a definition of correctness of assertion? No. We must qualify our adequacy condition for a theory of truth: it must be possible on the basis of an adequate theory to explain all the facts that need explaining. Not all facts about truth need explaining. If truth is a property at all, then other properties and relations will presuppose it, e.g., any property of the form being true and being F. Moreover, knowledge, perception (that p), and other factive relations presuppose truth. The mere fact that that a notion presupposes truth, surely, doesn't entail that truth is substantial. (Deflationism is not so easily refuted.) In general, facts about truth that follow from analyses or definitions of other properties do not need to be explained by a theory of truth, but may be explained by theories of those other properties. Consider an analogy. We would not fault a theory of goodness if we could not use the theory to explain the (putative) fact that an act is right iff it maximizes goodness. If we could use a utilitarian theory of right action to explain it, that would be sufficient. Similarly, if (Def) is correct, then we could explain the fact that

<p> is correct for S to assert iff, were S to assert <p>, then <p> would be true

by appealing to a theory of correctness of assertion, viz. (Def), rather than a theory of truth.

Finally, on the basis of (New HOA), the deflationist may explain true instances of (HOA), as originally formulated, as follows:

(21) One is incorrect to assert that p if it's not the case that, were one to assert that p, it would be that p. (New HOA)

(22)	One's asserting that p cannot make any difference as to whether p or not-p.	Empirical fact
(23)	Not-p.	Assm for Cond. Pf.
(24)	It's not the case that, were one to assert that p, it would be that p.	22, 23
(25)	One is incorrect to assert that p.	21, 24
(26)	One is incorrect to assert that p if not-p.	23 - 25 Cond. Pf.

To recapitulate. Either (HOA), suitably restricted, states a fact about truth – a norm of truth – or it doesn't. If it doesn't, then the deflationist doesn't need to explain it. If it does state a fact about truth, it will do so in virtue of the fact that correctness of assertion presupposes truth. But then the deflationist may explain it along the lines of (19) – (21), in which (HOA), suitably restricted, is explained by means of a derivation from the deflationist theory of truth and a premise grounded in a definition of correctness of assertion.

At this point the reader might wonder what all this discussion has to do with the speakers of Price's imagined community. Recall that these speakers, though competent with the denominalizing truth predicate of propositions, fail to recognize, in either their theory or practice, the existence of a hyper-objective norm over assertion. Is this failure consistent with having an adequate grasp of truth? The deflationist must say yes, since these speakers demonstrate a firm grasp of facts of the form  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff p. Price thinks the answer must be no.

The deflationist is right to say yes. We can argue for this by dilemma, in effect retracing our previous dilemma. Either the (HOA) states a fact about truth or it does not. (For simplicity, let us ignore the need to restrict the principle.) Suppose (HOA) does not state a fact about truth. Then the imagined speakers' cognitive failure is not attributable to an inadequate grasp of truth. They may fail to recognize other facts about truth, such as (HOA-T), i.e., the principle that "one is incorrect to assert that p if  $\langle p \rangle$  is not true," but only because they fail to recognize a fact that isn't about truth, (HOA). Suppose, alternatively, that (HOA) does state a fact about truth. Then,

as we have seen, correctness of assertion presupposes truth. What, then, accounts for the speakers' failure to know the fact about truth registered by (HOA)? Not an inadequate understanding of truth, I submit, but rather a failure to recognize the existence of a norm over assertion that presupposes truth. This ignorance precludes the speakers from knowing a principle like (20) above, and so precludes them from knowing (HOA).<sup>20</sup>

Despite Price's argument to the contrary, then, the deflationist about propositional truth is well equipped to accommodate the normativity of truth.

### **III. Can Our Response Save Deflationism About Sentential Truth, too?**

Finally, I want to discuss how things stand for the deflationist about sentential truth, who centers her theory on (DS). Can she avail herself of the sort of reply I've offered on behalf of deflationists about propositional truth? My answer is that she can if, but only if, she can explain an important connection between sentential truth and meaning. I will explain in this in some detail.<sup>21</sup>

Let us recast (19) – (26) to serve the purposes of this deflationist. We want to see if we can explain the variant of (HOA) for sentential truth, viz.

(26\*) One is incorrect to assert 'p' if not-p.

Of course, if (26\*) is not a fact about truth, the deflationist needed explain it. So suppose it is.

Considerations parallel to those discussed in previous sections show that (26\*) is a fact about truth only if correctness of assertion presupposes truth. We now work with (Def\*) in place of the earlier definition of correctness of assertion:

(Def\*) A sentence  $\sigma$  is correct for a subject S to assert iff, were S to assert  $\sigma$  and  $\sigma$  to mean what it (actually) does, then  $\sigma$  would be true.<sup>22</sup>

Here 'mean what it does' may, for now, be left as intuitive. (More on this later on.) (19) – (21) would then be altered, and expanded, to reach:

- (19\*) 'p' is true iff p . (DS)
- (20\*) One is correct to assert 'p' only if, were one to assert 'p' and 'p' to mean what it does, then 'p' would be true. From (Def\*)
- (20.1\*) Were one to assert 'p' and 'p' to mean what it does, then 'p' would be true only if p. ?
- (20.2\*) One is correct to assert 'p' only if, were one to assert 'p' and 'p' to mean what it does, then p. (20\*)-(20.1\*)
- 
- (21\*) One is incorrect to assert 'p' if it's not the case that, were one to assert 'p' and 'p' to mean what it does, then p. (20.2\*)

Given (21\*), the deflationist may argue to (26\*) relying on empirical fact (22\*) in place of empirical fact (22):

(22\*) One's asserting 'p' cannot make any difference as to whether p or not-p or as to whether 'p' means what it does.

Given (21\*) and (22\*), (26\*) is then derivable using conditional proof in the fashion of (21) – (26). As before, (26\*) will not hold in full generality, but only when the corresponding instance of (22\*) holds.

The key question, here, is what entitles the deflationist to (20.1\*). (MTC), I think, is its most natural ground:

(MTC): Necessarily, if 'p' means what it (actually) does, then 'p' is true iff p.

(Like (DS), (MTC) would hold only for "central declarative sentences," and not for declaratives involving indexicals and demonstratives.) One might ask our deflationist why (MTC) should hold. Isn't this a fact about sentential truth that needs explaining? If it is, how is it to be explained?

Hartry Field (1994) explores the question of how deflationists about sentential truth might address the sort of problem (MTC) poses. He argues that to speak of 'p' meaning what it (actually) does in a counterfactual world W is to speak of 'p' as used in W being translatable by 'p' as we use it in our world. He then explains truth for sentences in counterfactual worlds in terms of translatability into "disquotationally true" sentences in our world. (277) His

explanation of (MTC) would presumably proceed as follows. Suppose ‘p’, as used in some world W, is translatable by ‘p’ as we use it. Then since ‘p’ as we use it is true iff p, ‘p’, as used in W, is true iff p. Thus, for any world W, if ‘p’ means in W what it does in our world, then ‘p’ is true iff p. Strictly speaking, Field is relying on a two-part deflationist theory of sentential truth. The first part consists of (DS), the second of the claim that a sentence is true iff translatable by a true sentence of our actual language. Field is, of course, concerned to keep his proposed account deflationist in spirit, and so he rejects notions of translation that presuppose objective meaning relations.<sup>23</sup>

What bears emphasis, for us, is that deflationists about sentential truth must reckon with the problem of explaining (MTC) in any case, independently of the issues raised by Price’s argument. If the problem is soluble, then the deflationist may rebut Price’s argument by means of a variant of the strategy I outlined in Section II (with (19\*)-(26\*) substituting for (19) – (26)). If, on the other hand, the problem is insoluble, then regardless of the force of Price’s argument, deflationism about sentential truth is false. To see this, suppose the problem is insoluble. Then, admittedly, the deflationist about sentential truth would be powerless to explain facts of the form <one is incorrect to assert ‘p’ if not-p> if these are indeed facts about truth. But whether these are facts about truth or not, the deflationist would be powerless to explain any of the wide range of perfectly ordinary non-normative facts about truth expressed by counterfactuals, e.g., any and all facts of the form <if ‘p&q’ were true, then both ‘p’ and ‘q’ would be true>. Many such facts do not obtain in virtue of facts about what our words would have meant if they hadn’t meant what they actually mean. The closest worlds in which ‘The New York Yankees lost Game Four of the 2001 World Series and the Arizona Diamondbacks won Game Four of the 2001 World



Series' is true are worlds in which this sentence, and every one of its parts, means exactly what it does in the actual world.

Deflationists about sentential truth, then, can avail themselves of my reply to Price if their view has the resources to solve the deeper problem of accounting for the fundamental meaning-truth connection embodied in the principle (MTC), that if 'p' means what it (actually) does, then 'p' is true iff p.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'It's not the case that p' here should be read as equivalent to 'not-p', rather than 'it is not true that p'. We can formulate the principle as follows

One is incorrect to assert that p if not-p.

Price so formulates it on p. 246 of his (1998).

<sup>2</sup> For arguments against deflationism about truth for utterances and sentences that do not extend to deflationism about truth propositions, see Soames (2000, 5-6) and McGrath (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Price claims that, in the debate over normativity, Horwich "wins the battle but Wright wins the war." (241) Let us look briefly into this battle and war to determine what sorts of deflationism are under attack.

Wright fires the first volley in his (1992), in which he gives an explicit answer to the question whether a deflationist can escape his anti-deflationist argument by retreating to deflationism about propositional truth. He summarizes Horwich's deflationism about propositional truth as involving the claims (i) – (iii) (here paraphrased from Wright 1992, 22n15):

- (i) There is a property of truth, but there is nothing to say about what truth really consists in.
- (ii) "...the truth predicate exists solely for the sake of a certain logical need, to wit, the need to express attitudes to propositions whose content is unspecified and to whole classes of propositions simultaneously".
- (iii) it is possible on the basis of a theory containing as axioms all and only uncontroversial instances of the equivalence schema (E) for propositional truth:  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff p.

Wright then continues:

Horwich's brand of deflationism initially concerns a predicate of propositions, rather than sentences, with claim (iii) about the Equivalence Scheme supplanting the part more usually assigned to the DS. But it should be evident enough that the combination of claims (i) – (iii) will fall to essentially the objection developed in the text, since that objection can as well be developed with the Equivalence Schema as the centre of attention as with the DS. (1992, 22n15).

The "battle" and the "war" are not about (DS) in particular, but about any sort of equivalence schema that involves denominalization, (E) included. It is a battle over deflationism, no matter what the truth-bearers are taken to be.

Price himself regularly alternates between taking sentences and taking propositions to be the objects of assertion (and so between different views of the identity of truth-bearers). For example, when he formulates the principle of objective assertibility, he uses the language of "asserting that p" – seemingly taking propositions as the objects of assertion – but then in his gloss of that principle, he writes " 'p' is objectively assertible by a speaker who not only believes that p but is justified in doing so" (245), seemingly taking sentences to be the objects of assertion. This inattention would be inexcusable if Price were not directing his argument against deflationism about both propositional and sentential truth. Charity, therefore, together with the repeated references to Horwich as a target, makes it reasonable to interpret Price as directing his argument against Horwich's deflationism about propositional truth.

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I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to explain the relevance of deflationism about propositional truth to Price's arguments.

<sup>4</sup> To be precise, the minimal theory is the totality of non-pathological propositions having the propositional structure expressed by (E). This averts the necessity of invoking possible extensions of English in order to accommodate propositions giving the truth-conditions of propositions that cannot be expressed in present day English. For more on propositional structures or forms, see Horwich (1990, 19-22).

Horwich uses the term 'minimalist' where I use 'deflationist'.

<sup>5</sup> Here I add the qualification "simplest" to Horwich's account of adequacy (1990, 7). Without the qualification, many theories will be adequate if any is (one could conjoin the simplest theory with any other necessarily true proposition to arrive at a further adequate theory).

<sup>6</sup> Many properties (arguably) satisfy the conditions for claim (a). Examples from philosophy include existence, goodness, meaning, and identity; examples from outside philosophy include perhaps mass and charge. Thus, there are many properties for which claim (a) holds. But it is unclear whether there are properties other than truth and its relatives (exemplification, satisfaction) for which (b) holds. It seems unlikely that the facts about existence, for example, or meaning, can be explained by reference to a single (or even several) simple principle(s).

<sup>7</sup> One might wonder why analyses of truth must be inadequate if the deflationist theory centered on (E) is adequate. In Section II, after we see how Horwich-style explanations typically work, we will be in a better position to see why it's impossible for both the deflationist theory of truth and an analysis of truth to be adequate. See in particular note 14.

<sup>8</sup> See Horwich (1993, 28). The norm Horwich mentions is 'If p, then one should assert that p'.

<sup>9</sup> Horwich prefers to state the deflationist theory without using honorifics such as "obviously" and "necessarily", and then to derive the honorific-enhanced principles from separate theories of those honorifics (from separate theories of a priority, obviousness, necessity). See Horwich (1990, 22n6). Alternatively, one might build the honorifics into the statement of the theory, taking as the fundamental truth schema (i) above in place of (E). Either way, (i), including its parenthetical clause, will be available for the deflationist's use.

<sup>10</sup> This proof relies on the assumption that where P and Q are obviously and necessarily equivalent, one has adequate grounds for believing P iff one has adequate grounds for believing Q.

<sup>11</sup> As Gupta (1993) has noticed, Horwich-style explanations seem unable to explain general facts about truth, but only arbitrary instances of such facts. However, this objection to deflationism is orthogonal to Price's objection (and to Wright's). I therefore put these issues aside. Because I do so, I do not make pains to distinguish talk of explaining general facts from talk of explaining all the instances of schemata. In fact, I allow myself to speak loosely of explaining schemata such as (HOA). This talk is conveniently ambiguous between talk of explaining general facts and talk of explaining the facts expressed by the instances of a schema. Similarly, I occasionally speak loosely of explaining instances of schemata, rather than the facts those instances express.

<sup>12</sup> To say that the deflationist doesn't need to explain a principle, of course, isn't to say that it doesn't require explanation. Even supposing (HOA) doesn't record a fact about truth, it might still record an important fact requiring explanation. And perhaps Price's own account will be useful in giving such an explanation (250-1). Yet truth needn't enter the story.

<sup>13</sup> In what follows, unless various kinds of correctness of assertion are explicitly under discussion, I will use 'correct' to pick out hyper-objective correctness.

<sup>14</sup> This reasoning generalizes. Suppose truth consists in F-ness. Then the deflationist must explain facts of the form

(F1)  $\langle\langle p \rangle\rangle$  is F iff  $p$ ,

because these are facts about truth. But she can only explain (F1)-facts by appealing to facts of the form

(F2)  $\langle\langle p \rangle\rangle$  is F iff  $\langle p \rangle$  is true.

What, then, of (F2)-facts? They are facts about truth, too. To explain them, the deflationist must appeal to (F1)-facts, if she is to explain them at all. Thus, her explanations run in a circle, and (F1)-facts are left unexplained, with the consequence that the deflationist theory is inadequate.

In general, then: if truth is analyzable, then deflationism is inadequate.

<sup>15</sup> Depending on one's general attitudes toward normative notions, one may understand the relation between the left and the right sides of ' $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff  $p$ ' differently. The normative naturalist may count the condition expressed by

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'p' as reducing the condition expressed by '<p> is correct to assert' (just as the naturalist ethicist might say that the condition expressed by 'A maximizes desire satisfaction' reduces the condition expressed by 'A is right'). A normative non-naturalist will rather count 'p' as merely specifying a potential non-normative subvenient base in virtue of which <p> would be correct to assert. She would say that snow's being white grounds the correctness of asserting that snow is white; but she would deny that the latter reduces the former. The two approaches are distinct, but both are deflationist.

<sup>16</sup> One might raise questions about the time-element in (13). For this reason, one might prefer to consider propositions such as that expressed by 'I am not asserting anything now nor will I assert anything in the next few minutes'.

<sup>17</sup> The argument I give in the text for the hyper-objective incorrectness of asserting (13) parallels the standard argument in favor of the hyper-objective incorrectness of asserting, say, that Istanbul is in Russia. Irrespective of one's beliefs and one's evidence, it is incorrect to assert that proposition.

<sup>18</sup> Nothing I have argued is meant to undermine the claim that there is a notion of correctness attaching to assertions – to speech acts of assertion – that satisfies the following condition:

Assertions are correct iff they are assertions of true propositions.

But from this, one cannot conclude that the truth of a proposition consists in its being correct to assert.

<sup>19</sup> Or, as in note 16, we might consider the proposition expressed by 'I am asserting something now or will do so within a few minutes on a particular occasion'.

<sup>20</sup> One might doubt whether these speakers could fail to appreciate that there is a norm over assertion that presupposes truth while having an adequate understanding of truth. But it is clear that a person might adequately understand a notion N but fail to realize that there is an N-presupposing norm over a class of actions. (The same point made about explanation earlier in the main text, I develop here in connection with understanding.) I might adequately understand the notion of human welfare but fail to realize that there is a notion of right action (the utilitarian's notion) that presupposes it. I might think that the only valid notion of morally right action is deontological.

<sup>21</sup> In this final section of the paper, I address the concerns of an anonymous referee who asks whether a philosopher sympathetic to deflationism about truth across the board, and so to deflationism about sentential truth, could avail herself of my response to Price. The referee notes that the argument consisting of (DS) and (20) as premises and (21) as conclusion would fail, since it would rely on a substitution of 'p' for "'p' is true" in the consequent of a counterfactual. This is correct, and thus a more complex argument is needed, one that compensates for the modal differences between the instances of (DS) and the instances of (E).

<sup>22</sup> As we saw before with (Def), we might need to complicate (Def\*) in order to avoid the conditional fallacy. Here, again, though, the details of the formulation of a definition of sentential correctness of assertion are not so important. The structure of the key derivations is unaffected.

<sup>23</sup> Horwich prefers to think of (DS) as about utterances: "the correct form of the disquotational schema is

(D) This ('p') is true iff p." (1990, 105)

How, then, would he justify the following principle, which is analogous to (MTC)?

(MTC-Utt) Necessarily, if this ('p') means what it (in fact) does, then it is true iff p

Presumably, he would advert to his "auxiliary assumption" that specifies "the relationship between truth for propositions and truth for utterances," (107), viz.

(A) u expresses the proposition that  $p \rightarrow (u \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \text{the proposition that } p \text{ is true})$  (107)

If (A) holds with necessity, we are in good shape to explain (MTC-Utt). But one might wonder whether (A) is available to Horwich as an assumption. (A) seems to state an important fact about the relation between truth for utterances and truth for propositions. In fact, nothing about (A) seems essentially schematic. It readily generalizes to give us

For all utterances u and propositions P, if u expresses P, then u is true iff P is true.

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which, assuming that an utterance can't be true unless it expresses a proposition, gives us

For all utterances  $u$ ,  $u$  is true iff  $u$  expresses a true proposition

But this, I should think, is a substantial theory of truth for utterances. It has the standard form of philosophical analyses: a universalized biconditional purporting to provide non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions. I therefore find it difficult to see how Horwich is entitled to employ his auxiliary assumption (A) without turning his back on deflationism about truth for utterances. Of course, if 'expressing a proposition' is itself given a deflationist treatment, the above might still count as deflationist in spirit, since although it analyzes utterance truth, it analyzes it in terms of deflationist notions of truth and expression. However, it is doubtful that the facts expressed by instances of the schema

' $p$ ' expresses  $\langle p \rangle$

will suffice to explain all the facts about expressing. For one thing, it is contingent that any particular sentence expresses the proposition it does (or any proposition at all). Cf. McGrath (1997).

<sup>24</sup> I thank Jonathan Kvanvig and an anonymous referee.

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