"True" as Ambiguous

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In this paper, I argue (a) that the predicate "true" is ambiguously used to express a deflationary and a substantial concept of truth and (b) that the two concepts are systematically related in that substantial truths are deflationary truths of a certain kind. Claim (a) allows one to accept the main insights of deflationism but still take seriously, and participate in, the traditional debate about the nature of truth. Claim (b) is a contribution to that debate. The overall position is not new and it has previously been defended by supervaluationists about vagueness. However, the position is here motivated in a new, independent way, and an explanation is offered why some uses of "true" do not seem to require disambiguation.

> "The word 'true,' like other words from our everyday language, is certainly not unambiguous. And it does not seem to me that the philosophers who have discussed this concept have helped to diminish its ambiguity." (Tarski 1944, p. 342)

According to deflationists, the truth predicate (and the concept of truth it expresses) fulfills a merely syntactic function, and that exhausts its meaning. Given this meaning, they claim, there is no room for the view that "true" expresses a metaphysically interesting concept worthy of further analysis. Deflationism thus denies the basic presupposition of the traditional debate on the nature of truth. If deflationism is correct then the traditional debate is misconceived, or so it seems.

The deflationist explanation of the rationale for a truth predicate is, in my view, convincing. However, it does not follow from these deflationist insights that the traditional debate about the nature of truth is misconceived. For there is good reason to believe that the natural language truth-predicate is used to express more than one concept. On some occasions of use it expresses a metaphysically neutral, deflationary notion of truth, on other occasions it expresses a substantial and

metaphysically interesting notion of truth.[1] If this is correct, then the main insights of deflationism leave room for interesting metaphysical debate about truth. For it may be that the traditional debate does not concern the deflationary concept. This is the first thesis of the paper. The second thesis of the paper (a rejection of which does not require rejection of the first), is a contribution to the metaphysical debate. I propose an analysis of the substantial concept of truth in terms of the deflationary concept and a notion of objectivity.

The proposals in this paper are not new. They amount essentially to a Tarskian response to the question "What is the right conception of truth?". The question wrongly presupposes that there is only one correct conception of truth. In Tarski's own words:

> I do not have the slightest intention to contribute in any way to those endless, often violent discussions on the subject: "What is the right conception of truth?" …
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> It seems to me obvious that the only rational approach to such problems would be the following: We should reconcile ourselves with the fact that we are confronted, not with one concept, but with several different concepts which are denoted by one word; we should try to make these concepts as clear as possible (by means of definition, or of an axiomatic procedure, or in some other way); to avoid further confusion we should agree to use different terms for different concepts; and then we may proceed to a quiet and systematic study of all concepts involved, which will reveal their main properties and mutual relations. (1944, p. 355)

I take myself to be contributing to Tarski's project. My positive proposal as to the relationship between the deflationary and the substantial concept of truth is very similar to that of Field (1994, see also McGee 2005) and McGee and McLaughlin (1995). However, my motivation

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[1] The occasions of use I have in mind here are those where "true" is applied to *contents of thought or speech*. Sentence truth and utterance truth, in my view, are theoretical concepts related to content truth. I shall comment briefly on this relationship in §5 below. Most theorists agree that "true," when applied to entities other than contents of thought and speech, sentences or utterances, (e.g., "true wheel," "true friend," "true rate of inflation") expresses unrelated concepts. Though, as Künne 2003 shows, there are some prominent figures in the history of philosophy who took "true" in "true friend" and "true" in "true claim" to express the same concept.

for the ambiguity thesis will be different.[2] The motivation I offer also allows a natural account of the close overlap between the two concepts expressed by "true."

My agenda is as follows. In §1 I outline the deflationist conception of truth and the presuppositions shared by participants of the traditional debate about the nature of truth. In §2, I discuss various ways in which the question "What is truth?" can be taken, showing that it cannot be taken for granted on any of the interpretations that there is only one concept of truth. In §3, I offer some considerations in favour of the thesis that "true" can be used to express two different concepts, a deflationary and a substantial concept. In §4, I articulate a particular proposal about the substantial one of the two truth concepts. The proposal is that substantial truth is a special kind of deflationary truth. In §5 I explain how "true" as employed in logic and semantics should be interpreted. Finally, in §6, I address two objections.

1. Deflationism and the Traditional Debate about Truth

Unlike redundancy theorists, deflationists about truth believe that the truth predicate cannot be eliminated without loss. It has an important function, a function that is illustrated by examples such as "The main claim of section 4 of this paper is true." "Everything Kripke says is true." or "One of Quine's doctrines is true." We can't easily eliminate occurrences of "true" from such uses. To eliminate it from the first example, we would have to know how to articulate in sentential form the main claim of section 4 of this paper. To eliminate it from the second, we would have to form a very long conjunction which might start, roughly, like this:

> If Kripke says that names are rigid then names are rigid, and if Kripke says that god exists, then god exists, and if Kripke says that porridge tastes great, then porridge tastes great …

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2   While Field is showing that deflationists can make sense of "non-factualism" about a range of discourses (vague, indeterminate, evaluative, conditional) by postulating an additional "determinate" or "straightforward" notion of truth, I am positively arguing for the thesis that "true" as used in natural language is ambiguous. Supervaluationists about vagueness are dialectically in a reverse situation to Field's: they primarily have a substantial non-bivalent truth notion which they explicate as truth relative to all sharpenings. But considerations like those of Williamson and Adjelkovic 2000 lead them to give certain significance also to a disquotational truth notion, e.g. García-Carpintero 2007. The interest of this paper relative to these views lies in the fact that it provides an independent motivation for a two-concept view of truth.

and so on for all the things Kripke might possibly say.[3] A truth predicate, deflationists claim, allows us to get around this problem.[4] For, when prefixed with a singular term referring to a proposition, the truth predicate generates a sentence that expresses, by virtue of its meaning, a proposition equivalent to the one expressed by the original sentence. The truth predicate is a "de-nominalizer"—it turns a noun referring to a proposition into a sentential phrase expressing an equivalent proposition.[5] For example, the proposition expressed by "The main claim of section 4 is true." is equivalent to the main claim of section 4. Some deflationists express this view of the meaning of "true" by stating that we accept (or have at least an inclination to accept) each instance of the equivalence schema: "The proposition that p is true iff p."[6]

Deflationists usually combine their analysis of the point and meaning of the truth-predicate with a second, anti-metaphysical claim. They claim that their analysis of the meaning of "true" is all we might reasonably want from a theory of truth. The de-nominalizing function of the truth-predicate is its only function and there is no reason to assume that it should express a metaphysically significant property that is shared by all and only the true propositions, and which it makes sense to analyse.[7] It would be equally absurd to expect there to be an interesting property expressed by the word "very," or by the passive voice—even if neither of these devices is redundant.[8]

The traditional debate about truth, however, assumes precisely that truth, the property expressed by "true," is a metaphysically important property that it is indeed worth analysing. Thus for example, correspondence theorists claim that this property consists in a relation

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[3] Another way to eliminate "true" from the same sentence would be by attempting a claim involving substitutional quantification along the lines of "For all p: if Kripke says that p, then p." I cannot here discuss the merits of eliminating "true" in this way.

[4] See e.g., Ramsey 1927, Quine 1970, Grover, Camp and Belnap 1975, Leeds 1978, Field 1986, Williams 1986, Wright 1992, Brandom 1994, Horwich 1998, Soames 1999.

[5] It is not easy to specify the kind of equivalence needed here—it is not identity (see Gupta 1993). Let us, for the moment, assume that equivalence here is necessary material equivalence. See Horwich 1998, postscript for some discussion.

[6] Cf. Horwich 1998, e.g., p. 126. The qualification in brackets allows Horwich to make room for competent users who do not accept paradoxical instances of the schema (these users will resist the inclination).

[7] Cf. Horwich 1998, pp. 1–2.

[8] Another example, which, unfortunately, is too closely related, is negation: suppose there is a linguistic device (negation) which, when prefixed to a sentence, produces a new sentence which expresses a truth when the original sentence did not and which expresses something not true if the original one did. What reason is there to believe that this expression picks out some interesting property worth analysing?

between propositions or beliefs and mind-independent reality.[9] Coherence theorists claim that this property is one that a proposition or belief has just if it is part of a coherent set of propositions/beliefs.[10] Pragmatists of one sort claim that to be true is to be useful.[11] Pragmatists of a different sort claim that truth is the property an opinion has if ideal thinkers would agree upon it at the limit of enquiry.[12]

According to the participants of the traditional debate, the function of the truth predicate is to permit us to attribute a certain interesting property to contents of thought or speech, and it is precisely the nature of this property that is in dispute. Thus, participants of the traditional debate disagree with both deflationist claims, namely with their analysis of the meaning of "true" and their anti-metaphysical claim.

It may at first appear that the two issues that are in contention—the deflationist analysis of the meaning of "true" and the deflationist's view that truth is not worth analysing—are unconnected, i.e., that one could accept the former and reject the latter. Indeed, why not accept the deflationist's meaning analysis, but continue with the traditional debate? Even if the truth-predicate is there to do the "syntactic trick" it may still express a property and that property may be worth analysing. Even if *de iure*, the truth-predicate is just a denominalizer, in may turn out *de facto* to express an interesting property.[13]

There are some obstacles, however, to taking this line. Some of the a priori principles concerning truth that figure in traditional debates are in tension with the deflationist's meaning analysis. For example, one a priori principle from which a traditional debate might start might be that true propositions represent the world correctly, and that truth is objective. Not every participant in the traditional debate will agree with this principle, but many will. If that principle is correct, then truth is a supremely interesting property, an analysis of which will help us understand the relationship between our thought and the world. The analysis of truth becomes crucial for our view of objective reality. (It is for this reason that correspondence and coherence theorists are often seen as

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[9]   More precisely, truth, according to classical correspondence theorists is the relational property that a proposition/belief has just if there is a fact to which it corresponds. Examples of this sort of view include Wittgenstein 1922, Moore 1953 and Russell 1918/19.

[10] Cf. Joachim 1906, Bradley 1907, Hempel 1935 and Blanshard 1939.

[11] Cf. James 1907.

[12] Cf. Peirce 1878.

[13] Alston 1996 and Sosa 1993 seem to hold that the deflationist's meaning thesis is neutral with respect to the traditional metaphysical debate. Wright 1992, 1996 also holds a deflationist view of the concept of truth while arguing that the concept picks out a substantial property, though different properties in different areas of discourse.

allied with realism and idealism respectively.) Another, similar a priori principle might be the view that truth is absolute: true once and for someone, then true always and for everyone. However, the acceptance of these substantial principles concerning truth will encourage, or even entail, the view that truth is a property for which not every content of thought or speech is a suitable candidate. Thought and speech do not always aim at representation of objective reality. Thus the contents of thought or speech that do not will not be "truth-apt."[14] They are neither true nor false, because they are not in the business of representing objective reality.[15] In other words, those who accept that true propositions represent objective reality correctly will have to deny the truth-aptness of any propositions (thought/speech contents) that are not in the business of representing objective reality. Now, not every participant in the traditional debate about truth will accept a priori principles about truth of this sort. Nevertheless, because some participants do accept such principles, it cannot, in the traditional debate, be taken for granted that all contents of thought and speech are evaluable in terms of truth.

This sits ill with the deflationist view of the purpose and function of the truth predicate. According to the deflationist, the truth-predicate answers the need for a de-nominalizer, i.e., the need for a predicate with the help of which we can express propositions equivalent to propositions we can merely refer to or describe (see above). This need arises independently of the representational status of propositions (the contents of thought and speech). We need to be able to call Kripke's claims true whether these claims concern objective matters or not. In the terminology of a recent debate: deflationism about truth leads to minimalism about truth-aptness. But minimalism about truth-aptness cannot be taken for granted in the traditional debate, because many substantial views of truth reject minimalism about truth-aptness.[16]

Let me summarise what I have just argued in easily manageable form. Deflationists make the following claims:

(D1)   "True" is a de-nominalizer, nothing more.

(D2)   The property, truth, expressed by "true" is not a metaphysically significant property worthy of analysis.

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[14]   There is a difference between saying that some proposition is not truth-apt (or not a candidate for truth) and merely saying that it fails to be true. A pebble is not true, but this is no failure or defect, because pebbles are not truth-apt.

[15]   A classic example of such a view is Ayer 1937. Evaluative thought is an example of thought that is held by many not to be aimed at representing objective reality.

[16]   Cf. Smith 1994, Divers and Miller 1994 and Horwich 1994.

The deflationist's meaning thesis (D1) leads to minimalism about truth-aptness:

> (D1*)   All propositions (contents of thought and speech) are truth-apt.

Participants of the traditional debate, let's call them "substantialists," make the following claims:

> (S1)   "True" expresses the property truth.

> (S2)   Truth is a metaphysically significant property worthy of analysis.

Some participants in the traditional debate will employ a priori principles such as:

> (S3)   True propositions represent objective reality correctly.

> (S4)   Truth is absolute.

Claims like (S3) and (S4) are incompatible with (D1*) and therefore with (D1). But the traditional debate can hardly rule out claims like (S3) and (S4) from the start. In other words, if we are to take seriously claims like (S3) and (S4) in the traditional debate, as we must, then we cannot accept (D1).[17]

2. *The* Concept of Truth

Suppose that the deflationists are wrong and the substantialists are right. Suppose that (S1) and (S2) (as well as, perhaps, (S3) and (S4)) are correct. In this situation it might be concluded that even though the deflationists are wrong about *the* truth predicate and *the* truth concept, any community of thinkers and speakers ought to have a predicate of which the deflationist's theses are true. For, as the deflationists have shown, such a predicate is very useful.

Suppose, now, that the deflationists are right and the substantialists are wrong, i.e., that (D1) and (D2) are correct. Again, we might conclude that even though the substantialists are wrong about *the* truth predicate and *the* truth concept, at least they have described a predicate

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[17]   Those who claim, (like Sosa 1993, Alston 1996, Damnjanovic 2005, that a substantial theory of truth is compatible with the deflationist's (D1) seem to be unaware of the restrictions (D1) places via (D1*) on any substantial account of truth.

and a concept that it would be quite useful to have, useful at least for those who want to discuss metaphysics.

There seems to be no ground for denying that both substantialists and deflationists describe a coherent predicate and a coherent concept that it would be useful to have. Perhaps some may wish to deny the usefulness of the substantialist's concept on the grounds that it involves obscure or incoherent metaphysical notions such as those of reality, of representation or of objectivity. But the legitimacy of such a complaint will depend on the precise use metaphysicians make of those concepts. It would be prejudice to conclude that the substantialists' notions of truth, objectivity etc are obscure or confused even before they have started. Prima facie, a predicate and concept conforming to (S1)–(S4) is coherent and useful. There is no ground for a substantialist either, to deny that a predicate that actually functions the way deflationists say the truth-predicate functions is useful and quite harmless (except perhaps in connection with the liar paradox).[18]

If, then, there are no doubts about the legitimacy and usefulness of each concept of truth, what are deflationists and substantialists disagreeing about? At least prima facie, they are offering competing answers to the question "What is truth?". There are at least two ways of reading the question.

First, it might be a question about "the" predicate "is true" as actually used by normal speakers and about "the" corresponding concept they thereby express.[19] In that case, the question is an empirical question that should be answered by recourse to empirical information concerning our thinking habits and language use. Secondly, it might be a question about "the" concept of truth that has figured in the traditional debate about the nature of truth, throughout the history of philosophy. In that case the question is a question of exegesis. I believe that on neither reading there are grounds for the uniqueness

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[18]   McGee 2005 doubts that the syntactic function of the truth predicate alone provides sufficient justification for a deflationary truth-predicate because a substantial truth-predicate can equally do this job. (He goes on to offer a different justification: the usefulness of a deflationary truth-predicate in mathematical proofs.) I disagree with the basis for McGee's doubts. A substantial truth-predicate cannot discharge the deflationary function because there are propositions which are not apt for substantial truth, but which nevertheless generate the same need for a deflationary truth-predicate. Relatedly, I disagree with McGee's claim that the difference between the two truth notions is "near-invisible" (see next section).

[19]   This may be a question about a particular natural language, like English, or a particular dialect or idiolect of English. The question might also be understood in a broader, more ambitious sense: what concept is expressed in English by "is true" and in other languages by translations of "is true."? In each case, the question is one about actual language use.

assumption encapsulated in the occurrences of the definite article that I have flagged up with scare-quotes. Let me explain.

It is a substantial empirical assumption that there is only one everyday truth-predicate that expresses only one everyday concept of truth. Many expressions we use are ambiguous, and such ambiguity is not always obvious. In the next section, I shall discuss every day use and argue that many English speakers use ''is true'' to express at least two distinct concepts. I will also be discussing other examples of natural language expressions whose ambiguity is not obvious.

The uniqueness assumption is equally unfounded when it comes to philosophical exegesis. It is by no means clear that philosophers in the historical debates about truth have always had in mind the same concept. Take for example Aristotle's famous claim that to say of what is that it is and to say of what is not that it is not is true (*Metaphysics* Γ7, 1011b26–8). At first sight this seems to address the sort of notion the deflationist has in mind. For Aristotle's definition does not seem to leave any room for anything but minimalism about truth-aptness. Whenever something is said of something (i.e., predicated) we thereby have a candidate for truth. On the other hand, the Cambridge correspondence theorists[20] quite clearly seem to be addressing a metaphysical question. We cannot understand their remarks unless we take them to be addressing a question about the kind of predicate of which (S1) and (S2) are true. The claim that Aristotle, and the Cambridge correspondence theorists were expressing the same concept when using ''true'' therefore leads to an uncharitable interpretation of at least one of them. Thus, in Tarski's words, ''we should reconcile ourselves with the fact that we are confronted, not with one concept, but with several different concepts'' (1944, 355). The uniqueness assumption in the question ''what is the correct characterization of *the* concept expressed by 'true'?'' is simply unwarranted.[21]

There are no doubt further ways in which the question ''What is truth?'' can be taken. One that is often made explicit is the question of a *criterion* of truth, as opposed to an account of what truth is. The point I am making is that even if two philosophers are agreed that they are addressing the question of what truth *is* (as opposed to the question

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[20]   I borrow this term from Künne 2003. The Cambridge correspondence theorists include Moore, Wittgenstein and Russell.

[21]   Of course, some historical theorist of truth, *Q*, may say explicitly that she takes herself to be in conflict with some other philosopher *R*. In some cases, such announcements will have to count as indirect evidence that *Q* and *R* have in mind the same concept. However, it may always turn out that the best interpretation is one according to which *Q* was just wrong to believe that she was in conflict with *R*.

of how to tell truth from untruth), they may still equivocate on "truth," because the word "true" is regularly used to express two different concepts.

There may be yet another way of taking the question "What is truth?". Some philosophers may start directly from some substantial a priori assumptions about truth (along the lines of (S3) and (S4), for example), not addressing any questions about expressions or concepts actually used. In particular, they may be discussing the consequences of such assumptions. It is clear that those pursuing this kind of a priori project are not competing in any way with anyone who does not share the assumptions from which they start. Whether their project is "really" an investigation concerning truth is again a moot question.[22]

In the next section, I shall argue that there are some reasons to believe that we ordinarily employ both a concept that conforms to the deflationist's theory and a distinct one that conforms to the substantialist's description.

3. The Ambiguity of "True"

Does ordinary usage conform to the deflationist's or the substantialist's theory? I believe that there is some evidence for the hypothesis that ordinary usage conforms selectively to either theory, because many users use "true" ambiguously. On some occasions of use, "true" expresses a deflationary concept and on other occasions of use it expresses some substantial concept of truth.

Some preliminaries. Let me clarify what I have in mind when I say that "true" is used ambiguously. The claim is of the form "on some occasions of use expression e is used to express $c1$, and on other occasions of use e is used to express $c2$ ($\neq c1$)." There are several ways in which a claim of that form could be true. It could be that e is lexically ambiguous in much the way "coach" is in English. In that case, deep syntax contains two distinct syntactic elements, $E1$ and $E2$, and each of them has a different semantic axiom. Thus, disambiguation would take place at a pre-semantic stage of interpretation. A second way in which such a claim might be true involves disambiguation at the semantic stage. Thus, while there is only one syntactic element E at the level of deep syntax, the semantic axiom concerning E makes its interpretation context-sensitive. Some theorists claim that gradeable adjectives like "rich" or "tall" have this feature. They supposedly express different properties in different contexts of use. A third way of taking the claim that e expresses different concepts on different occasions locates

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[22] Compare Jackson 1998, ch. 2, for a comparison of the significance of examining concepts used by us with that of examining concepts in the abstract.

disambiguation at the pragmatic level. On this view, while e is syntactically unambiguous and semantically context-insensitive, it is nevertheless not always used to express the same concept. For speakers often express concepts even though their words do not semantically encode these concepts. Thus, while a given utterance of e may semantically express concept $c1$, the speaker may intend to communicate, and succeed in communicating some distinct concept $c2$.

One might call the first phenomenon "syntactic ambiguity," the second "semantic ambiguity" and the third "pragmatic ambiguity." The term "ambiguity" is usually reserved for syntactic or lexical ambiguity. Semantic ambiguity is usually called "indexicality," or "context-sensitivity," and pragmatic ambiguity usually goes under the label "conversational implicature." For terminological convenience, let's understand "ambiguous" to include all three kinds of ambiguity. Strictly speaking, my evidence will provide direct support only for the thesis that "true," as used in ordinary discourse, is ambiguous in this generic sense. However, I believe that with certain further methodological assumptions, the evidence would count as evidence in favour of syntactic ambiguity. To discuss these further assumptions would take us too far afield. For the purposes of this paper, however, the important thesis is only that speakers use "true" to express different concepts, namely sometimes a deflationary concept and sometimes a substantial concept. Whether or not this variation in what the word "true" is used to express should count as genuine syntactic ambiguity cannot be settled conclusively here.

Consider the sort of evidence one might use to show that an expression is syntactically ambiguous. The evidence would usually consist in the intuitions of competent users about correct usage. On one method, these intuitions are accessed directly by the researcher in virtue of being a competent user. This seems to be standard procedure in natural language semantics. The method is unproblematic as long as intuitions are uncontroversial among competent users (as they usually are). On a second method, statistical data concerning language use are collected and used to support hypotheses about correct usage. This second method is not unproblematic because all we can observe is *actual* use, we have no way observationally to recognize *correct* use. But on some crude assumptions about the relationship between actual use and correct use (e.g., "actual use is not regularly incorrect") such statistical data can nevertheless add some support to the researcher's own linguistic intuitions.[23]

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23   I am aware that the value of statistical data in this connection is limited (consider the research that has shown "affirming the consequent" to be a regularly used form of inference).

Thus, in order to show that "coach" is ambiguous, it is sufficient to observe that it can be linguistically competent and rational for one and the same person in one context to accept "Coaches are human." and in another context to accept what looks like the negation of that sentence, namely "Coaches are not human.", without changing his or her mind. (One might use the first sentence when the trainer is late for the match and when later talking to a bus driver who is anthropomorphizing his bus excessively one might use the second.) We can directly consult our intuitions about that, and support these with further statistical or experimental data of usage. The only good explanation of such usage would be the syntactic ambiguity of "coach." Thus an inference to the best explanation would support the view that "coach" is syntacically ambiguous. Such an account can be backed up further by an account of the way in which language users regularly disambiguate with the help of contextual features. And it would need to be shown that semantic and pragmatic ambiguity do not constitute better explanations.

What sort of data of language use are there to support the thesis that "is true" is ambiguous (even when applied to contents of thought and speech, i.e., putting to one side occurrences such as "true friend")? Many users would accept, or make, utterances like the following two:

> (U1) That's true. (where someone has just uttered "Chaplin is funny.")

> (U2) Statements (judgements, beliefs, propositions etc) about what is funny cannot be true or false.

I believe that mere linguistic competence does not, in this case, tell us that anyone who utters both (U1) and (U2) must therefore either have changed their mind or be confused. Even users who disagree with (U2)—e.g., because they think that questions of humour are objective—will still be able to see that (U2) does not contradict (U1). (U1) and (U2) do not seem to be incompatible. We could easily construct further examples of this sort. Consider this exchange:

> (U3) John: Everything Benedict says is true.

> (U4) Mary: But one of the things he says is that skiing is more fun than swimming. And claims concerning matters of taste cannot be true or false. So not everything Benedict says is true or false. You were wrong.

Do readers agree that Mary seems to be misinterpreting John deliberately? If not, consider the following response:

> (U5)   John: You are just being clever. You know exactly what I meant. I meant that whatever Benedict says, he is always right.

What John says is perfectly coherent. We understand it immediately and we do not need to do violence to our ordinary understanding of English in order to understand him. One good explanation for this is that "true" and "false" (as applied to contents of thought and speech) have at least two meanings: on the one hand they express concepts that can be applied across the board, i.e., to any content of thought or speech one likes. These concepts may conform to the deflationist's theory of truth and falsehood. On the other hand, they express concepts the application of which is suitable only in a certain range of contents of thought and speech. These concepts may conform to substantialist theories of truth and falsehood. Again, the evidence here gives direct support only for the thesis that "true" and "false" are ambiguous in the generic sense. Arguing that this is syntacic ambiguity would take further argument.

For those readers who have doubts about my intuitions regarding (U1)–(U5), I would like briefly to mention some experimental data produced when I distributed questionnaires among philosophy students at the beginning of three successive lecture-courses on truth. The questionnaire consisted of 9 statements, each of them followed by the options "true," "false" and "no answer." I asked students to tick one option in each case. Here are the second and sixth statements on the questionnaire:

(Q2)	Ali G is very funny.		
	True ☐	False ☐	No answer ☐

(Q6)	Statements (judgements, beliefs, propositions) concerning what is funny can't be true or false.		
	True ☐	False ☐	No answer ☐

Each time more than half of the students chose either the "true" or the "false" option for (Q2) and also chose the "true" option for (Q6). In one year the proportion was as great as two thirds. Students gave these answers on the same page, and in quick temporal succession. I believe that the best explanation for this is that (at least in the idiolects of many of the students) "true" is ambiguous. When students called (Q2) "true," they were expressing a deflationary concept of truth. When students accepted (Q6), they were taking "true" in (Q6) to express a substantial concept of truth. Now, as mentioned before, statistical data of

usage are a problematic source of evidence regarding correct use, for we have no way of observing which uses are correct, or which students are rational. However, on the admittedly crude assumption that actual use is not incorrect in the majority of cases, these data would seem to offer some extra support to the ambiguity thesis.

Substantialist sympathizers (of the sort who agree with (Q6)) might try to console themselves with the thought that students who ticked "true" or "false" regarding (Q2) did so only because I tempted them into this frequent and convenient, but ultimately incorrect shorthand. We often call things true or false that are not the sort of thing that can be true or false, so they might argue, and when we do so, we usually mean to express (non-semantically) the deflationary concept.[24]

However, this is just to say that "true," rather than being syntactically ambiguous is merely pragmatically ambiguous. I said earlier that the data can also be accommodated by the hypothesis that "true" is pragmatically ambiguous for the students in question. Whether we have syntactic or pragmatic ambiguity is a difficult question. However, a problem with this pragmatic reading is that there seems equally good reason to view the deflationary concept as the semantic meaning, and the substantial concept as the one that is merely pragmatically expressed. In that case, when the students called (Q6) true, they were talking about the proposition pragmatically conveyed by (Q6). The proposition semantically expressed, namely that judgements about what is funny cannot be deflationarily true or false, is obviously false, so they interpreted (Q6) as expressing another proposition, one involving a substantial concept of truth. One problem of the pragmatic reading is that there seems to be no reason to prefer one reading to the other.

A very different reason for a pragmatic reading may be a desire to legislate language use so as to preserve expressive power and avoid unnecessary unclarity through syntactic ambiguity.[25] However, in that

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[24]   Some are tempted to say that we mean to say that we agree. However, that interpretation doesn't always work. Consider "I try to agree with what you say only if what you say is true." Thus, those who argue that the ambiguity in question is pragmatic better argue that the intended concept is that of deflationary truth.

[25]   Compare the case of recent misuse of the phrase "to beg the question." Presumably at the time of writing the majority of English speakers understand, and use, "begging the question" to mean the same as "raising the question." The older, quite specialized meaning of "committing a *petitio principii*," is not known to many users at all. In this particular case, it would be desirable to return to a state where "begging the question" can only be used to refer to *petitio*. For the disadvantage of a new ambiguity is not offset by an increase in expressive power: the new use of "begging the question" is merely a stylistic variant on "raising the question." Similarly, if there was some other expression that unambiguously expressed either the deflationary or the substantial concept of truth, then that would be a reason to use "is true" unambiguously for the other notion.

case we would no longer be talking about correct usage, but about how the rules of language ought to be improved.

My conclusion is that at least as far as common usage is concerned (both measured in terms of linguistic intuitions and measured by statistical data), there is evidence to suggest that "true" is used ambiguously between a deflationary and a substantialist reading. I do not have conclusive evidence that this ambiguity is syntactic ambiguity (there could not be such evidence). But whatever it is, this shows that the deflationist's insights into the rationale for a truth predicate can be had without giving up on the traditional debate about truth.

4. Of Dogs and Ducks

Suppose that "true" is indeed syntactically ambiguous. Then one problem remains. Ordinarily, if an expression is syntactically ambiguous, as in the case of "coach," then interpretation usually requires a decision in favour of one of the readings. Not so in the case of "true," it seems. There would seem to be many uses where no such decision is required. In this section I shall explain this fact and cite some analogous cases that are uncontroversially accepted to be cases of ambiguity.

If we accept the thesis that "true" can express two different concepts, a deflationary and a substantial concept of truth (whatever the kind of ambiguity involved), then we still ought to explain how users disambiguate "true" on any occasion of use. As in other cases of ambiguity, users will choose, in each case, the interpretation that best fits the context. Let's write "trueD" for "true in the deflationary sense," and "trueS" for "true in the substantial sense." In the above examples (U2), (U4), (Q6), the context then requires "trueS" because these utterances would be obviously false if "true" were interpreted as meaning "trueD." All these cases exploit the fact that it makes sense for truthS, but not for truthD, to say that some contents of thought and speech are not evaluable as true or false.

Take another example:

> (U6) John: "That's true." [uttered after Mary has said: "But I paid the phone bill."]

What is the correct interpretation of "true" in (U6)? There does not seem to be anything to choose between interpreting it as "trueD" and interpreting it as "trueS." Moreover, it does not even seem necessary to choose in order to understand (U6). This does not normally seem to happen with ambiguous expressions. In each normal use of "coach,"

the user either means a bus or a trainer but not both.[26] In ordinary cases of ambiguity, disambiguation is required for interpretation. I think the explanation for cases like (U6) lies in the close relationship between truthD and truthS. Let us consider some analogous cases.

Most people do not recognize immediately that the words "dog" and "duck" are ambiguous in a certain way. Nevertheless they demonstrably are. Consider the following pairs of utterances:

> (U7)　No dog is allowed in the playground.

> (U8)　Fifi is a dog, not a bitch.

> (U9)　Ducks like eating old mouldy bread.

> (U10)　It's a drake, not a duck.[27]

It seems clear that in (U7), "dog" is meant to include all canines, whether male or female. However, in (U8), "dog" clearly does not include all canines, for if it did, (U8) would be contradictory. Instead, "dog" here includes only male dogs. (U9) and (U10) are similar: "duck" in (U9) includes all ducks, no matter what sex, while "duck" in (U10) includes only female ducks. The ambiguity of "duck" and "dog" may not immediately be recognized by competent users, but it will be when users are confronted with suitable examples such as (U7)–(U10).[28]

The two possible meanings of "dog" and "duck," of course, are closely related. Let's say "dogU" for "dog in the sex-unspecific sense" and "dogM" for "dog in the sex-specific sense," analogously with "duckU" and "duckF." Then we can define "dogM" in terms of "dogU," and "duckF" in terms of "duckU":

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[26]　An utterance of the following sentence would be taken as a sign of madness: "Crucial to winning the championship were once again the coaches: the team arrived on some of them and were given instructions by others."

[27]　Thanks to Harold Noonan for the examples. As Ben Curtis has pointed out, certain professional denominations, such as "policeman" or "actor" are ambiguous in a similar way.

[28]　Some may quibble about whether this is a semantic phenomenon or a pragmatic one. In other words, some might say that the word "dog" unambiguously means all members of the canine species, and that all that (U8) generates is an ad hoc interpretation of "dog" as "male dog." The same could then be argued about the alleged ambiguity of "true." I am not opposed to this reading, as long as it is acknowledged that "dog" and "true" *are used to* express different concepts in the different cases, and that we do have both concepts in our repertoire.

(D1) For all x, x is a dogM iff x is a dogU and x is male.

(D2) For all x, x is a duckF iff x is a duckU and x is female.

Since dogsM are dogsU of a certain kind, there can be (and are) many cases of dogsU that are also dogsM. The same goes for ducksU. This fact explains why there are uses of "dog" and of "duck" where one does not feel the need to interpret one way rather than the other. These are cases where both concepts apply.

Here is an example. John owns males of many different species and rents them out for breeding purposes. Thus, he owns several male dogs, several stallions, several tomcats, several hamsters etc. Suppose John owns *only* male animals, and this is known to his friends. One day, one of his animals is ill and he phones his friend, the vet and says: "Poor Louis is ill. Can you come and see him?" The vet, who can never remember the names of John's animals, responds by asking: "Remind me, is Louis a cat or a hamster? John answers with (U11):

(U11) John: "Louis is a dog."

It seems to me that neither the vet nor John needs to decide whether "dog" in (U11) means "dogU" or "dogM." Either will do. Disambiguation is not mandatory. Let's call such cases "neutral cases." Neutral cases will not occur with ordinary ambiguous words like "coach" or "bank," because usually the alternative meanings are mutually exclusive. Nothing is both a coach in the sense of bus and also a coach in the sense of trainer. Nothing is both a bank in the sense of river-bank and also a bank in the sense of financial institution.

My hypothesis about "trueD" and "trueS" is that they are related in a way that is exactly analogous to the way I proposed for "duck" and "dog" in (D1) and (D2). This hypothesis explains why the ambiguity of "true" is not easily recognized, and it also explains neutral cases, i.e., cases where we feel no need to disambiguate. The hypothesis is that truthS is a species of truthD. In other words, for a proposition to be trueS is for it to be trueD and to fulfil a further condition. For want of a better word, let's say this condition is that the proposition be *factual* (I shall say something about what might be meant by "factual" below). My hypothesis, then, is that there is a property of factuality such that to be trueS is to be factual and trueD:

(D3) For all x, x is trueS iff x is factual and x is trueD.

If this is correct, then the case of (U6) above is just a neutral case like (U11). When John says that it is true that Mary has paid the phonebill,

there is no need for him or his audience to decide whether he meant trueS or trueD. This is so because the proposition in question is factual anyway, so that it is clear that truthD and truthS coincide. Since cases such as this one are abundant, users do not easily notice that "true" is ambiguous and need to be exposed to examples like (U1)-(U5), or (Q2)/(Q6) before they realise this. Thus, my hypothesis about the relationship between the two possible meanings of "true" (given by (D3)), would explain why, if "true" is ambiguous between "trueS" and "trueD," this ambiguity is not immediately recognisable and why there are neutral cases.

Recall the conclusion of §3: there is some evidence that "true" is ambiguous between a deflationary and a substantial reading. If "true" is ambiguous in this way, then one can combine the insights of deflationism about the need for a truthD-predicate with the traditional metaphysical quest for an analysis of truthS. Hypothesis (D3) is a contribution to the traditional debate. For it claims that the concept of truthS is analysable in terms of other concepts, namely the concept of truthD and the concept of factuality.

One of the two analysantia, the concept of truthD, I believe, is sufficiently explained by my explanations in §1 concerning the meaning of the truth-predicate according to deflationists. This concept is not in itself metaphysically interesting. Thus, if the analysis is correct, the metaphysical beef will reside in the other analysans, the concept of factuality. There is no space here to enter detailed discussions of this concept. Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate that my proposal is theoretically fruitful, I shall briefly indicate one promising way of developing the concept of factuality.

In my view, factuality is *objectivity*:

(D4)   For all x, x is trueS iff x is objective and x is trueD.

A proposition (i.e., a content of thought or speech) p is *objective* just in case it is a priori that when one thinker believes p and another thinker believes not-p, one of them must be mistaken.[29] In other words, a proposition is objective just if disagreement about it cannot, as an a priori matter, be faultless. The objectivity status of a proposition is an a priori matter available to competent thinkers who employ that proposition. Thus competent users know in an a priori way that a proposition such as the proposition that Mary has paid the phone bill is objective.

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29   This definition is inspired by Crispin Wright's criterion of Cognitive Command, as employed in his 1992. I have developed this notion in more detail in my 2002, 2003, 2005.

They also know that a proposition such as the proposition that sardines are tasty is not objective. This is manifest in our habits of speaking and thinking. If Mary and John are in disagreement about whether Mary has paid the phonebill, then they will assume that only one of them can be right and they will, given sufficient interest in the matter, try to find out who is wrong. However, the same does not happen when John and Mary are in disagreement over whether sardines are tasty: they will not automatically assume that one of them is wrong, nor will they try to find out who is wrong. If (D3) is read as (D4) then it is indeed a substantial contribution to the traditional debate. One can easily imagine different proposals, such as the proposal that all and only those propositions are factual that involve exclusively natural properties, or properties that are reducible to natural properties.

The two theses about the truth-predicate defended in this paper are largely independent of any specific view of factuality. The thesis that "true" is ambiguous does not involve the notion of factuality. The thesis that truthS should be analysed in terms of truthD as proposed in (D3) is independent of the particular interpretation of "factual" I offered in (D4).

5. Validity, Bivalence and Pluralism

In this section I shall explain which concept of truth we employ when we say that validity is guaranteed truth-preservation, and when we give the semantics of a formal language.

Suppose in addition to (D4) that something is falseS just if it is objective and not trueD:

> (D5) For all x: x is falseS iff x is objective and x is not trueD.

(D4) and (D5) entail that any non-objective proposition will be neither trueS nor falseS. TruthS is therefore not bivalent, at least if there are any non-objective propositions.

This explains why truthD is better suited than truthS for employment in a characterization of validity. Many intuitively valid arguments involve premises or conclusions which are not objective and hence not truthS-apt. A definition of validity in terms of preservation of truthS would rule out the genuine validity of such arguments.[30] All potential premises and conclusions are, however, evaluable in terms of truthD

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[30]   It might seem that one could just use a *different* notion of validity for these arguments. But often, intuitively valid arguments with non-factual premises or conclusions will also be intuitively *of the same form* as certain valid arguments without non-factual premises or conclusions. Compare Hurley 1984.

(with the possible exception of some arguments whose conclusions are decisions). Thus minimal truth is the concept of choice when it comes to defining validity in ordinary language.

This explains why the current view is not vulnerable to a certain objection that has been raised against a different form of truth pluralism. On one reading of Crispin Wright's *Truth and Objectivity*, it puts forward the following form of pluralism about truth: in order to qualify as a truth-notion, a notion needs to conform to a number of minimal platitudes about truth. There are many such truth notions—one for each area of discourse. While they all share the minimal features, they differ in other respects. Thus the word "true" is ambiguous, for it expresses different truth notions in different areas of discourse.

It can be objected to such a view (and Wright has distanced himself from this interpretation of his view) that it would complicate our account of validity.[31] For if different areas of discourse involved different truth-predicates then there would be no unequivocal sense in which valid arguments with premises and/or conclusions from different areas of discourse could be said to preserve truth.[32]

The ambiguity thesis defended here faces no such problem. Every potential premiss or conclusion of an argument that we might want ordinarily to characterize as valid is truthD-evaluable, so that validity can be defined generally in terms of preservation of truthD.[33]

However, the issue of which concept of truth is involved in a characterization of validity raises some further questions. Logicians usually study formal languages, thus the concept of validity they employ will be defined in terms of a notion of truth that is defined stipulatively in the description of the formal language they are studying. How is truthD related to the concept of truth employed there? Similarly for the concepts of truth employed in formal semantic theories: how are

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[31] Compare Sainsbury 1996 and Tappolet 1997, 2000, Beall 2000 and Pedersen 2006. Wright distances himself from the ambiguity reading of his pluralism about truth for example on p. 924 of his 1996a (which is a response to Sainsbury 1996) and on p. 7 of his 1996b.

[32] It may be possible to remove this problem by defining validity instead along the following lines: an argument *P*1, *P*2, … , therefore *C* is valid iff the truth-in-*P*1's-discourse of *P*1 and the truth-in-*P*2's-discourse of *P*2 and … would guarantee that *C* is true-in-*C*'s-discourse. A similar suggestion is made by Beall 2000, but Tappolet answers that this response to the difficulty does seem to introduce a property of truth-in-one's-discourse, which would be a property all truths share (contrary to pluralism's defining thesis). See Pedersen 2006 for a very useful and clarifying discussion of Tappolet's objection.

[33] In Pedersen's terminology, the thesis here defended is a "weak linguistic pluralism" and thus immune to Tappolet's objection.

they related to truthD? Clearly, the logician's and the semanticist's predicate mean whatever the logician or the semanticist stipulate it to mean. Often, there will be a relation of similarity between the two: both "trueD" and the stipulated truth-predicates will conform to something analogous to the equivalence schema or the disquotational schema. However, no closer relationship between "trueD," "trueS" and the semantical predicate need be assumed.[34]

6. Two Objections?

In this final section, I want to address two possible objections.

The first objection questions the metaphysical significance of my claims. A hard-boiled metaphysician might argue that all I have done is made some highly language-specific suggestions concerning English, or even concerning some individuals' English idiolects. How could this possibly have any significance for the metaphysical question of what truth is?

This objection raises some methodological issues. I am the first to concede that my claim that "true" is used ambiguously is a claim about a specific language. Even if my observations were true for a significant proportion of English users, and even if they were true of translations of "true" into other natural languages as well, it is not obvious what this has to do with questions about truth, as opposed to questions about "true" and its translations into other languages. Nevertheless, I believe that the relevance of these claims to the debate about truth cannot be denied. My language-specific considerations were relevant because they address the question what concepts people express when they use a truth-predicate and I have argued that on two natural ways of understanding the question "what is truth?" it is a question about the concept or concepts expressed by "true" (either in everyday language or in philosophy).

Of course, abstract considerations concerning concepts do not by themselves show much about the world. It remains a substantial, and possibly empirical, question whether anything falls under any of the concepts discussed. Thus it is a substantial question whether anything is trueD or trueS. I have not said anything about how we find out whether a proposition is trueD. Thus I have not helped with the epistemological question of the criteria for truthD or truthS. But I have addressed the question of what truth is: I have shown that one of the things we might mean when we ask "what is truth?" is truthD, and that another is truthS. I have also answered the question what truthD

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[34] See Kölbel 2001 and 2008 for more details about the role of truth in natural language semantics.

is, and the question of what truthS is. Thus, even though I have had to pay attention to language, when trying to understand the question, and even though this has taken up a large part of this essay, I nevertheless provided answers to the question, and these answers are not merely empirical claims about language use. Thus, the hard-boiled metaphysician's complaint is groundless.[35]

The second objection concerns whether truthS distributes across disjunction. It seems that we cannot allow truthS to distribute across disjunction, i.e. truthS does not support the following rule of inference:

$$(\text{Dis}) \quad \frac{\text{trueS}(p \text{ v } q)}{\text{trueS}(p) \text{ v trueS}(q)}$$

For if we allowed (Dis) then we could prove that all propositions are objective. Consider the following argument, where p is chosen arbitrarily:

(i)	p v not-p	(logical truth)
(ii)	trueD(p v not-p)	(meaning of "trueD")
(iii)	(i) is objective.	(criterion for objectivity introduced in §4)
(iv)	trueS(p v not-p)	(from (ii), (iii) and (D4))
(v)	trueS(p) v trueS(not-p)	(using (Dis))
(vi)	p is objective	(from (D4) and (v))

Since this argument works for arbitrary p, it would show that every proposition is objective.

I believe that the objector is right to say that "trueS" does not support (Dis). The explanation of objectivity I gave in §4 requires us to accept (iii), i.e., that "p or not-p" is objective. For surely, if someone were to deny (i), it would be a priori that they are wrong. Thus, a fortiori, (i) is objective. The only other plausible place to stop the argument seems to be the move from (iv) to (v), i.e., the step that requires (Dis).[36]

However, I believe it to be unproblematic to reject (Dis). Whether we should accept (Dis) ultimately depends on whether the objectivity of a compound requires the objectivity of its constituents. To see this, apply the definition of "trueS" (i.e., (D4)) to (Dis):

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[35] Compare again Jackson's defence of conceptual analysis, and its relevance to metaphysics, in his 1998, ch. 2.

[36] Another way out would be to refuse to accept (i), i.e., to adopt an intuistionistic view. I shall not discuss this possibility, because I have already endorsed bivalence with respect to truthD.

(Dis') $\dfrac{\text{trueD}(p \text{ v } q) \ \& \ \text{O}(p \text{ v } q)}{[\text{trueD}(p) \ \& \ \text{O}(p)] \text{ v } [\text{trueD}(q) \ \& \ \text{O}(q)]}$

How could such a rule be justified? Let's grant that truthD distributes, i.e. that "trueD(p) v trueD(q)" follows from the first conjunct "trueD(p v q)." We would need to accept a further rule to the effect that if a disjunction is objective then so is each of its disjuncts. However, on the view of objectivity I was considering, a disjunctive proposition may be objective without any of its disjuncts being objective. For example, it may be impossible to have a faultless disagreement concerning the proposition that Buster Keaton is funny or not funny. For to deny this will involve a logical mistake. But that doesn't yet show that one cannot faultlessly disagree on whether Buster Keaton is funny. Thus, on this view of objectivity, there is good reason to reject (Dis).

It is worth observing also, that the objection can be rebutted independently of any *particular* account of factuality. One just needs to make the points I have made about (iii) and (Dis) in the form of a dilemma. Consider a version of the above argument (i)–(vi) in which "objective" is replaced by "factual" and "(D4)" is replaced by "(D3)." Either (a) the factuality of a disjunction requires the factuality of its disjuncts. Or (b) the factuality of a disjunction does not require the factuality of its disjuncts. In case (a), step (iii) of the derivation fails whenever "p" is non-factual, thus the objection (which relied on "p" possibly being non-factual) fails. In case (b), the inference from (iv) to (v) is illicit, because it relied on (Dis) and (Dis) cannot be justified, except on case (a). Thus either way the objection fails.[37]

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