

### 3. Later Views

#### 3.0 Introductory comments

By the early 1970s the linguistic approach to philosophy was beginning to fall from favour. In consequence, theorists of truth began to lose confidence in the idea that the everyday behaviour of the predicate ‘true’ is the key to the nature of truth. Yet, as the matters were separated, both were considered legitimate parts of a theory of truth. This tolerance is reflected in the abundance and diversity of theories that blossomed in the last decades of the century. And while many of these accounts are clearly descendants of those already encountered, the evolutionary distance between them is often large. To further compound the difficulty of providing a succinct, coherent narrative for this era, at this time, more than ever, philosophy’s characteristically looping method of progression resulted in “earlier” discussions being regarded by later writers as equally contemporary as those far closer to them in actual date.

#### 3.1 Correspondence without facts: Field

Most philosophers who wrote on truth in the later twentieth century saw themselves as either responding to or developing Tarski’s formal definition of truth. In his seminal paper of 1972, Hartry Field aimed to do both. In Tarski’s work Field saw the potential for a powerful correspondence theory liberated from the need to appeal to facts. However, according to Field, Tarski’s definition of ‘true sentence’ failed to satisfy two plausible constraints on a theory of truth: first, it should capture the meaning of ‘true’, and second, it should give a physicalistically respectable account of the nature of truth.<sup>1</sup> Because of the language-relative nature of Tarski’s definitions, the first is not satisfied; and the second is not met because (despite his advertisements to the contrary) Tarski had not managed to provide a definition of truth free of semantical terms. Even though Tarski himself may not have been concerned to be “physicalistically respectable” in Field’s sense, both objections are serious in ways which he would have had to recognize, and it is worth looking at Field’s arguments for them.

The two defects of Tarski’s definition stem from the same source – the list approach to defining satisfaction (and reference). As we saw (§2.2), basing the definition of truth on these lists means that it will not be applicable to new languages, or even the same language with as little as one new name added. Yet, Field argued, even if we ignore this defect, the list approach goes against one of the basic tenets of physicalism.<sup>2</sup> To show this, he relied on an analogy with the explanation of numerous chemical facts by appeal to the property of elements known as ‘valency’. Each element has a certain valency which determines how it can combine with other elements to form molecules. As Field points out, one way to explain what valency is would be to list each element along with its corresponding valency. Such an explanation should not satisfy a physicalist looking for an account of the nature of chemical valency, however, for the explanation does not

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<sup>1</sup> It is characteristic of much late twentieth century analytical philosophy that physicalism is treated as axiomatically true.

<sup>2</sup> Field 1972: 15-22.

even hint at the physical basis of these chemical properties. It merely postulates these properties as primitives. According to Field, it is only because we learnt that chemical valencies can be reduced to the electron configuration of atoms that these chemical properties have shown themselves to be physicalistically respectable. Similarly, a physicalist should not be content with Tarski's list of names and their referents, and predicates and their extensions. What is wanted is an explanation of what physical facts underlie these semantic facts. Without such an explanation, Tarski has only shown us how to reduce truth to other semantic concepts.

Field accordingly suggests that a satisfactory physicalist theory of truth would involve two stages. First, we use Tarski's work to define truth in terms of reference and satisfaction, of which we then give a physicalistically respectable theory. In other words, Tarski's definition is to be supplemented with a physicalistic story about what makes it the case that primitive terms have the semantic values they do.<sup>3</sup> It is important to recognize, however, that Field should have also demanded that a theory of truth provide an account of what makes it the case that the elements of the logical vocabulary have the semantic values they do. For it should be equally anathema to a physicalist to either assume or stipulate that some syntactic form is a negation as it is to stipulate that some name refers to some person.<sup>4</sup> But though accepting this point may make the position more difficult to defend, it changes little in the general approach.<sup>5</sup>

Field claimed that the result would be a correspondence theory. Unsurprisingly this sort of correspondence theory has proved popular.<sup>6</sup> It offers to rehabilitate a traditional and intuitive account of truth shorn of many of its implausible accretions. Yet although Field hoped to avoid some of the defects of Tarski's definition, he inherits one already mentioned: it is extremely difficult to apply it to many types of natural language constructions (see §2.2). Further, Field's fact-free correspondence theory relies on a workable theory of primitive denotation, a theory that three decades of philosophical research has failed to uncover. Moreover, three fundamental concerns remain.

First, one might hesitate in considering such a theory to be genuinely one of *correspondence* since both facts and any fact/utterance correspondence relation have been replaced in it by mere word/thing relations. However, Austin's explanation of the correspondence relation consisted in the elucidation of *meaning*, i.e. what makes 'p' mean that p. Similarly, Field hoped to use Tarski's work to turn an account of reference and satisfaction into an account of what makes it the case that a sentence has certain

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<sup>3</sup> Field 1972: 19, gives a causal theory of reference based on Kripke 1972 as an example of such a theory, but it is clear that any theory that explained the physical basis of reference would be satisfactory. Notice that not just any physicalistically respectable theory of reference will yield a correspondence theory of truth in Field's sense, because a theory of reference that paralleled a deflationary theory of truth would be acceptable to a physicalist.

<sup>4</sup> Soames 1984: 405-8; Stalnaker 1984: 30f.

<sup>5</sup> Field has since agreed with Soames and Stalnaker, but downplayed the importance of their observation. He points out that the general approach merely needs to be supplemented with a theory of reference for the logical vocabulary. This supplementation can seem impossible to come by if one assumes that such a theory must be a causal theory, but there is no reason to assume this. Field 2001: 27.

<sup>6</sup> For a defence of this approach see Devitt 1991.

truth-conditions. And, of course, a sentence is true when its truth-conditions are satisfied.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the comparison with Austin's theory should remind us of Strawson's complaint that it is difficult to see why such a theory about meaning and representation adds anything to the theory of truth, especially if truth-bearers have their truth-conditions essentially. Although Field has taken sentence-tokens as truth-bearers, Soames has argued that sentence-tokens are unable to play this role in a Tarskian truth definition, pointing out that there is no general principle for determining, for example, when one sentence-token is a negation of another. Instead, he urges, we should treat sentence types, abstract entities that belong to abstract languages and have their truth-conditions essentially, as truth-bearers.<sup>8</sup>

A third problem for Field concerns his valency analogy. In general, a physicalist will only require the sort of reduction available in the case of chemical valency when the property in question plays a causal-explanatory role in our best theories. A property that does not help to explain anything, or does non-causal explanatory work, should not be expected to be susceptible to such a reduction. Thus, if Field's analogy is to work, then truth must be a causal-explanatory property.<sup>9</sup> This realization led to a search for contexts in which truth plays a causal-explanatory role in the hope of thereby finding a motivation for the correspondence theory.

One realm in which truth might be taken to be explanatory is the theory of meaning. Davidson, for example, saw Tarski's truth-definition, because of its recursive character, as the best way to give a theory of meaning for a language.<sup>10</sup> Such a truth-definition tells us that certain utterances are true under certain circumstances. It was Davidson's contention that this information gives the meaning of those utterances, so that knowledge of the theory would give a finite being understanding of the language despite the potential infinity of utterances within it.

However, recall that Dummett insisted that Tarski's original definition cannot also be used to explain the meanings of the expressions of the language. The definition relies on our knowing these already. Of course, we can treat Tarski's definition in the opposite way and use it to explain the meaning of the terms of the language on the assumption that we already grasp the notion of truth that appears in the theory. Once Davidson realized that one had to choose between these two projects, he declared that he meant to be using the concept of truth to explain meaning and thereby the behaviour of those who use the language for which we have provided a theory of meaning.<sup>11</sup> It follows that, if Davidson is right about the form of theories of meaning, then truth has an explanatory role: it is the (or a) central concept in the theory that we use to explain behaviour. Unfortunately,

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<sup>7</sup> Field elaborates on this approach to truth in the opening paragraphs of Field 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Soames 1984: 410ff.

<sup>9</sup> This point has been pressed by Leeds and, following him, Putnam (Leeds 1978; Putnam 1978, Lectures I and II).

<sup>10</sup> Davidson 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Davidson 1990: 286.

Davidson's approach is incompatible with Field's for the reasons just canvassed. Field wanted to explain truth through providing a theory of content. Davidson used truth in order to provide a theory of content. Nevertheless, what Davidson's theory highlights is that we use content attributions in order to understand and to explain behaviour. *If* these attributions are essentially attributions of truth-conditions, then it looks as if truth is a central notion in an explanatory theory. Indeed, in Field's later work on truth, he has regarded the fundamental question as being whether what is causal-explanatory is, not truth itself, but rather, the property of possessing a given set of truth-conditions.

A different context in which truth seems to play an explanatory role is that of explanation of success. Whether it be the success of science or of individual agents in attaining what they want, we often explain success in terms of the truth of certain hypotheses or beliefs.<sup>12</sup> If someone's attempt is successful because he had a true belief about how to achieve his goal, then why not say that his success is due to the truth of his belief? In his original article Field said similar things about the role of truth in learning from others.<sup>13</sup> It seems plausible that, for many people we interact with, the explanation of why we believe what they say is that they generally speak the truth. So, even if we do not follow Field in seeing the debate over the explanatory role of attributions of truth-conditions as relevant, there is also a *prima facie* case for supposing that *truth* plays a causal-explanatory role. Perhaps, then, the strictures of physicalism will require a reduction of truth to physical properties paralleling the reduction of chemical valencies to electron configurations.

### 3.2 Redundancy without redundancy: Grover, Leeds, Prior, Williams

A year before Field argued for the substantiality of the property of truth, Arthur Prior was arguing for an extreme version of the opposite view. Like Ayer, he maintained that truth was not a property at all, but added that '... is true' should not be treated like a predicate and that sentences involving 'true' are equivalent to sentences that are 'true'-free. In this sense, Prior's treatment of truth, and Dorothy Grover's development of it, are redundancy theories. Yet both Prior and Grover also maintain that constructions involving 'true' perform useful functions. In this sense they do not suppose 'true' to be redundant at all. Whatever the label, their approach has a number of virtues, not least of which is that it suggests a neat general response to arguments, of which Field's is an example, that truth is a substantial property.

Prior begins with the idea that the primary truth-bearers are whatever the objects of thought are. As he maintains that it would be an obvious mistake to suppose that believing is a relation to sentences, the remaining option is that believing is a relation to propositions. However, Prior argues that propositions are 'logical constructions':

'Propositions are logical constructions' was first said as a summing-up of this theory [*viz.* Russell's multiple relation theory of judgement]. It meant that statements which appear to be about people and propositions are really about people

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<sup>12</sup> Putnam 1978, Field 1986. The view is obviously inspired by Ramsey 1927, but overlooks the fact that Ramsey's view is compatible with a redundancy theory: §1.5 above.

<sup>13</sup> See also Schiffer 1981.

and quite other things, so that it is not necessary to suppose that there really are such things as propositions.

(Prior 1971: 8)

Although Prior did not follow Ramsey in adopting a weakened version of Russell's doctrine of real propositional constituents, he did put forward a theory of belief statements that would have the like consequence that attributions of belief are not about propositions.<sup>14</sup> Adopting such a position renders the strong Ramseyan version of deflationism, the version that claims that 'p' and 'The proposition that p is true' are *intensionally* equivalent, more plausible than otherwise. The obvious worry about such a suggestion is that while 'Computers are useful' is about computers, 'The proposition that computers are useful is true' seems to be about a proposition. But intensionally equivalent sentences should be about the same thing. In response, a deflationist of this type is likely to claim that, despite appearances, attributions of truth are not about propositions. Ramsey and Prior made this view more plausible by arguing that in all other key contexts (such as belief contexts) statements that seem to be about propositions are really about something else. Prior did not stop at propositions: he suggested that facts are logical constructions too, and statements apparently about them are just about the things mentioned in stating them:

... facts and true propositions alike are mere 'logical constructions' ... and ... they are the *same* 'logical constructions' (to have 'true propositions' *and* 'facts' is to have *too many* logical constructions).

(Prior 1971: 5; his italics)

And C. J. F. Williams, who largely followed Prior, adds that it is the appeal to truth which explains the locution '... corresponds to the facts', not the other way around.

With both facts and propositions out of the picture, the only option seems to be an extreme redundancy theory according to which 'true' is not merely eliminable but not even a predicate at all. Both Prior and Williams focus their attention on the uses of 'true' that most troubled Ramsey's account – the cases where the proposition to which we attribute truth is not transparently specified.<sup>15</sup> They claim that in saying, for example, 'What John believes is true', we are saying (at least to a first approximation) 'For some p, John believes that p and p'. In taking this Ramsey-like approach, however, they incur an obligation to explain how the quantifier is to be understood. We have already seen the difficulties in trying to read it objectually. This problem is all the more pressing for the current view, for objectual quantification is standardly taken to imply ontological commitment to the entities quantified over. So, if we suppose for a moment that the variables stand for propositions, allowing objectual quantification would undermine Prior and Williams's attempt to do without propositions. But it would also undermine the claim that truth is not a property. For if objectual quantification over propositions is allowed then we can easily define the property that true propositions share as follows:

For all propositions x [x is true iff  $(\exists p)(x = \text{the proposition that } p \text{ and } p)$ ].<sup>16</sup>

The usual account of quantifiers suggests that the only other way to read them is substitutionally. Yet this other way relies on its being the case that 'For some p, John

<sup>14</sup> Prior 1971: ch. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Williams 1976.

<sup>16</sup> We have taken this point and this definition from Soames 1999: 48.

believes that  $p$  and  $p'$  is true if and only if there is a sentence such that if we substitute it for ' $p$ ' and erase the quantifier the result will be a true sentence. And this condition might not be met simply because there may be no sentence of our language that expresses John's true belief. So, Prior and Williams settle for neither the objectual nor the usual substitutional reading of the quantifier. Instead, they convert the substitutional reading to one in which the usual biconditional is replaced with a conditional. In other words, 'For some  $p$ , John believes that  $p$  and  $p'$  is true *if* there is a sentence such that if we substitute it for ' $p$ ' and erase the quantifier the result will be a true sentence. If this is right, then Ramsey's original explanation of these contexts has been vindicated. But it leaves the reading of the existential quantifier looking somewhat mysterious; and in fact it must be treated as an undefined primitive.<sup>17</sup>

In order to make the meaning of the existential quantifier here more transparent, even if it remains undefined, Prior suggested that we stop thinking of the propositional (or sentential) variables in this sentence as if they were nominal variables (i.e. variables that stand in for names). Rather, in the same way that nominal variables have their counterparts in ordinary language in the form of pronouns, propositional variables have their counterparts in expressions that have since been called prosentences. For example, 'he' in (10) receives its reference from the previously occurring name 'Jack'.

(10) 'Jack is untied and he is angry.'

Now consider (11).

(11) 'He explained that he was in financial straits, said that this is how things were, and that therefore he needed an advance.'

Parallelling the use of 'he', we might see 'this is how things were' in (11) as receiving its reference from the previously occurring sentential clause 'he was in financial straits'.<sup>18</sup> Following this line of thought we can read 'There is some  $p$  such that John believes that  $p$  and  $p'$ ' as 'John believes that things are a certain way, and thus they are'. In such cases, Prior maintains, we simply "extend the use of the 'thing' quantifiers in a perfectly well-understood way ...".<sup>19</sup> The worry that these quantifiers are not properly understood is thus ameliorated by the fact that we use and understand these types of expressions in ordinary talk.

But the worry can be entirely removed only if we can find some more commonplace examples of this type of speech. The leading claim of the prosentential theory of truth is that such examples are right in front of us. Prosententialists claim that 'That is true' and 'It is true' often function as what they term 'prosentences', and point out the many parallels between these expressions and pronouns.<sup>20</sup> For example, following Geach, we can point out two types of occurrence for each proform.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes we use proforms out of laziness, rather than use the original expression again. The use of 'he' in (10) is an

<sup>17</sup> Williams 1976: 14f. Prior outlines the truth-conditions for his quantifiers at Prior 1971: 35f.

<sup>18</sup> The example, and Prior's idea that certain expressions of English function as prosentences, are taken from Wittgenstein 1953: Part I, §134. Prior makes these points at Prior 1971: 38.

<sup>19</sup> Prior 1971: 37.

<sup>20</sup> The prosentential theory was first developed by Grover, Camp and Belnap 1975. It has been endorsed by Brandom (1988) and refined by Grover. See Grover 1992 for a collection of her essays on the prosentential theory and a useful introduction.

<sup>21</sup> Geach 1962: 124-43.

example of this. But we also sometimes use proforms in quantification contexts, as ‘he’ is used in (12):

(12) Mary loves someone and he is a lucky man.

The expression ‘it is true’ can function as a proform both in cases of quantification and of laziness. It occurs as a prosentence of laziness in (13):

(13) John believes that Brian has been cuckolded and it is true.

It also occurs as a prosentence of quantification in (15) which we can give as a rough reading, ignoring questions of pragmatics and implicature, of (14):

(14) What John believes is true.

(15) For some proposition, John believes it is true and it is true.

Like Prior and Williams, prosententialists argue that the propositional variables in these quantification cases be treated non-objectually and non-nominally.

In treating ‘It is true’ as a prosentence, prosententialists deny that ‘true’ is a predicate applied to truth-bearers: it is merely part of an expression that picks up its semantic value from a previously used sentence or sentential clause. Further, the ‘it’ and ‘that’ of ‘It is true’ and ‘That is true’ are not taken as anaphoric pronouns that refer back to a previously used sentence; rather, the whole expression, e.g. ‘That is true’, functions as a proform. And although prosententialists do not claim that ‘true’ is redundant (because anaphora are important parts of speech) they do maintain that sentences containing ‘true’ are equivalent to sentences that do not, or that contain ‘true’ only as part of a prosentence.<sup>22</sup> Having dispensed with the idea that ‘true’ functions as a predicate, they infer that there is no property of truth.<sup>23</sup>

These more sophisticated redundancy theories account for the role of ‘true’ in a wide range of cases and do so with an impressively parsimonious ontology. They also defuse a number of concerns philosophers have had about deflationary theories in general. For one, it is sometimes thought that deflationary theories are committed to some form of anti-realism by their rejection of facts as an ontological category. As Prior points out, though, no such conclusion follows (at least not in any obvious way). ‘That the sun is hot is a fact’ means the same as ‘The sun is hot’; hence, if the sun’s being hot is language- and mind-independent, so is the fact that the sun is hot. Redundancy theorists can even claim to capture the ‘correspondence intuition’ that our thoughts and statements, when true, correspond to the facts, agreeing with Tarski that ‘... corresponds to the facts’ amounts to no more than ‘... states that p and p’. As Williams makes particularly clear, the correspondence intuition does not amount to a correspondence theory.<sup>24</sup>

Further, prosententialism overcomes various problems with Ramsey’s redundancy theory. Attributions of truth have a pragmatic function ignored in Ramsey’s version. They often serve, as Strawson noticed, as endorsements of claims already made. The prosentential

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<sup>22</sup> This is not quite true. The prosentential account first offered by Grover et al. claims that we also need ‘true’ as part of sentence modifiers such as ‘it-is-not-true-that’ or ‘it-was-true-that’. While it is an important issue as to whether this move succeeds, we must ignore it here.

<sup>23</sup> Grover struggled with the issue of whether she should maintain that truth is a property mainly because she felt that one could give an extension for ‘is true’. Grover 1992: chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>24</sup> Williams 1976: ch. 5.

theory makes this pragmatic function the centre of its account of truth without succumbing to the Strawsonian exaggeration of supposing that ‘true’ has no other role. In fact, the important contexts of generalization that Strawson’s performative view was unable to deal with can now be easily handled: unlike earlier redundancy accounts, ‘true’ is deemed to be, precisely *not* redundant, but rather, as Quine urged, important in enabling us to express certain generalizations. The success of this account in explaining these contexts relies on our pre-existing familiarity with the functioning of proforms in quantificational contexts. But it should be emphasized that this success depends on the possibility of an alternative reading of the quantifiers that is neither objectual nor substitutional.

Importantly, having a workable account of these generalization cases provides deflationary theories with an intriguing response to the arguments of Field and others that truth plays an explanatory role in explanations of success or learning from others. It was unsurprising, then, that both the disquotationalist Stephen Leeds and the prosententialists Grover et al. suggested the response at about the same time.<sup>25</sup> While neither Leeds nor Grover considered this particular example, for ease of exposition suppose we agree to the following generalization:

(16) If someone has true beliefs about the location of the library, they are more likely to be able to find it.

The occurrence of ‘true’ in (16) may look as if it provides grounds for supposing that truth has a causal-explanatory role. But it is not clear that it does so if ‘true’ appears merely as a device of generalization. And it is plausible that we find ourselves asserting (16) simply because asserting the ‘true’-free (17) is impossible since it is infinitely long:

(17) If someone believes that the library is to the North and the library is to the North, they are more likely to be able to find it, and if someone believes that the library is behind the Physics building and the library is behind the Physics building, they are more likely to be able to find it ... .

Whether one adopts (as does Leeds) Quine’s explanation, or prefers the prosentential account of the use of ‘true’ in expressing generalizations, one can explain why the desire to say something like (17) results in our saying something that involves the use of the truth-predicate: namely, use of this predicate facilitates the expression of a claim that fundamentally has nothing to do with truth. And, indeed, although neither Grover et al. nor Leeds put the point in quite this way, their discussions of these issues ultimately convinced Field that the appearance of ‘true’ in many of these explanatory contexts was a result, not of the causal-explanatory power of truth, but merely of the fact that ‘true’ enables the easy expression of handy generalizations.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the virtues of prosententialism and the Prior-Williams account, the implication that ‘true’ is not a predicate and truth not a property makes the position difficult to accept. As Brandom points out, for example, in denying that ‘true’ is a predicate, prosententialists block off the possibility of treating ‘The last thing Bismarck said is true’ as a case of predication. Yet in such cases, a disquotational account ‘has no greater

<sup>25</sup> Grover et al. 1975: 112; Leeds 1978: 120-3.

<sup>26</sup> See the afterword to ch. 1 in Field 2001.

ontological commitments and stays closer to the apparent form of such sentences'.<sup>27</sup> The apparent logical structure of a range of our inferences involving 'true' also strongly suggests that it is a predicate. Horwich has often insisted in this context that we infer "from ' $x = \textit{that } p$ ' and ' $x$  is true' to ' $\textit{that } p$  is true', and hence to ' $p$ '."<sup>28</sup> Such inferences are most easily made sense of if we suppose that 'true' is here functioning as a predicate. Moreover, there is a weak conception of properties according to which, if we accept that 'true' is a predicate which determines a set, then truth is a property. The Horwich response appears to have formed the current orthodoxy in deflationist thinking (see §3.7).

### 3.3 Minimal correspondence: Alston, Mackie, Searle

Around the same time as both Field's correspondence theory and the new redundancy accounts were being proposed, John Mackie was advocating what he called 'the simple theory of truth'. The simple theory was largely an attempt to synthesize redundancy and correspondence theories to create a moderate, almost trivial, position. Twenty years later, in the mid-1990s, both William Alston and John Searle championed views that were very similar.

The minimal correspondence view results from abandoning the idea that correspondence is any sort of mirroring of reality by statements, or that there is some sort of one-to-one correlation between parts of a truth-bearer and parts of reality. In developing his own view through a consideration of Austin's correspondence theory, Mackie observed that the latter avoids this mistake, but instead falls into the implication that truth is a 'wholly non-linguistic, non-semantic relation, a situation's being of a certain type'.<sup>29</sup> The only way Mackie could see to retain the spirit of Austin's theory while avoiding this consequence was to suppose that 'to say ... that [a] statement is true is not merely to say that  $X$  is of type  $Y$ , but to say that *as was stated*  $X$  is of type  $Y$ '.<sup>30</sup> But once generalized beyond Austin's own kinds of examples, this distills into the claim that 'To say that the-statement-that- $p$  is true is to say things are as they are stated to be'.<sup>31</sup> Minimal correspondence theories thus admit truth-bearers and hold that truth is a relation. This makes a contrast with the deflationary views of the 1970s which abandoned the idea that truth is a relation because they abandoned any commitment to a substantial account of at least one of the *relata*, that is, of propositions or facts.

Nevertheless, to avoid the mistake of reinstating one-to-one correspondence relations, the minimal correspondence theory usually treats propositions in a recognizably deflationary way. Mackie, for example, emphasizes that propositions are not entities that we have non-trivially postulated in order to do explanatory work:

Statements or propositions are not (as, say, electrons and genes are) entities by the non-trivial postulating of whose existence we can better explain (and perhaps even

<sup>27</sup> Brandom 1988: 88. Brandom suggests the adjustments that a prosententialist can make to accept this while holding on to the claim that 'true' is not a predicate; but, as the quotation suggests, it seems more plausible to suppose that at least in some cases 'true' is functioning as a predicate.

<sup>28</sup> Horwich 1998a: 125.

<sup>29</sup> Mackie 1973: 48.

<sup>30</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* 49.

predict) what goes on and is observed. The words ‘statement’ and ‘proposition’ are just terms that enable us to speak generally about what is said, what is believed, what is assertible or believable and so on.

(Mackie 1973: 21)

Searle says much the same about facts:

The something that makes it true that the cat is on the mat is just that the cat is on the mat. And so on for any true statement ... *But we still need a general term for all those somethings, for what makes it true that grass is green, that snow is white, that  $2 + 2 = 4$  and all the rest. ‘Fact’ has evolved to fill this need.*

(Searle 1995: 211; his italics)

On the minimal correspondence view both ‘fact’ and ‘proposition’ are general terms but they do not pick out a natural kind or entities that can be called on to do explanatory work.<sup>32</sup>

With minimal facts and propositions in place there is nothing blocking the way to treating truth as a relation between these things. The question, of course, is what this relation amounts to. Both Mackie and Alston, brushing aside as mere cavils the doubts about objectual and substitutional quantification canvassed in the previous section, suggest that the right way to characterize the circumstances under which propositions are true is by using substitutional quantification to generalize what, following Horwich, is now often called the equivalence schema:

(ES) It is true *that p* if and only if *p*.<sup>33</sup>

They follow Prior and Williams in arguing that there is no real barrier to understanding this type of quantification or the use of propositional variables. In characterizing truth in this way, Mackie and Alston think that the nature of correspondence is made clear. Because the same propositional variable occurs on both sides of the biconditional, to say that a statement corresponds to the facts is just to say that how things are stated to be is how things are. Mackie says that if there were any further more complicated relations of correspondence (perhaps of the Fieldian kind) between language or the mind and the world, these are yet to be discovered and play no part in our ordinary understanding of ‘true’. Alston, however, allows that there may be a deeper nature to the correspondence relation than has so far been uncovered and that if it were found this would be a significant contribution to the theory of truth.

Mackie and Alston agree, though, that it is a virtue of this way of explaining correspondence that it requires a much tighter relation between facts and true propositions than is normally allowed for by correspondence theories. On this view the two are related, not by mere isomorphism or any other partial similarity, rather, they share the same content.<sup>34</sup> ‘If the best we could achieve was that our statements should somehow correspond to what is there, we should still be falling short of having things just as we state them to be’, says Mackie, echoing Frege’s and Bradley’s rehearsals of the

<sup>32</sup> Alston allows that there is work to be done on uncovering the structure of propositions, but sees this work as unnecessary for the theory of truth he offers.

<sup>33</sup> Horwich 1998a: 6.

<sup>34</sup> Alston 1996: 38f.

identity theory's siren song.<sup>35</sup> But although he agrees with much that Prior and Williams say about the similarity in meaning of 'fact' and 'true proposition', he insists that these are two things that can be related and that only one of them, the fact, is in the world. But *how* the two are related is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, Mackie claims that any attempt to spell out the connection would only lead us to think of it as looser than it is.

Searle's elaboration of the correspondence relation is less equivocal. He makes central use of the disquotational, rather than equivalence, schema, agreeing with the disquotationalist that the schema tells us the conditions under which the statement at issue will be true. He goes on to claim, though, that facts are just these truth-conditions' having been satisfied. We thus have conditions associated with a range of statements; some of these conditions are satisfied. We have the word 'true' for this sub-class of statements. But we also need a word that relates them to the satisfied conditions. 'Correspondence' is a useful expression 'just empty enough and vague enough to allow for all the different kinds of ways in which true statements stand in relation to their relevant fact.'<sup>36</sup> Because of this thin, 'trivial', reading of correspondence, Searle is able to maintain that 'both the correspondence theory and the disquotational theory are true, and they are not in conflict'.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, it is just this congeniality that is likely to arouse suspicion of the minimal correspondence theory: perhaps it has collapsed into triviality or vacuity. But then minimal correspondence theorists, like deflationists and others, are often happy to accept this consequence:

I have not said positively in the end any more than it seemed obvious that we should say at the start. If this discussion has any merit, it is in the avoidance of traps into which the example of various distinguished thinkers shows it is all too easy to fall. To give a correct account of the central ordinary sense of 'true' is like walking along a very narrow path with an abyss on either side.

(Mackie 1973: 57)

Thus it seems to its proposers that if the minimal correspondence view has merit, it will lie in its very minimality. But this has left others dissatisfied, still nagged by the suspicion that there must be more to say about truth than this, since the theory now appears to be mere deflationism and not a version of correspondence at all. The minimal correspondence theory has struggled to find the narrow path between the two abysses of triviality on the one hand and a substantial account of facts on the other. It was perhaps only a matter of time, then, before the idea of extra-linguistic entities that make truth-bearers true, or truthmakers, became part of mainstream philosophy again, but with the radical addition that these truthmakers may not after all be fact-like entities. Mackie's simple correspondence theory, however, may well have been the catalyst that allowed this to occur.

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<sup>35</sup> Mackie 1973: 57.

<sup>36</sup> Searle 1995: 213.

<sup>37</sup> loc. cit.

### 3.4 Truthmakers: Lewis, Mellor

The desire to rehabilitate the correspondence theory was only one of many reasons that truthmakers were eventually readmitted.<sup>38</sup> (As we shall see, closely tied to this motive, though the connection was rarely articulated clearly, was the desire to defend metaphysical realism from the sort of attacks levelled by Dummett, Putnam and Rorty.) But it was an important one. For example, Mulligan et al., like Field, condemned the Tarskian approach on the grounds that it failed to elucidate the relations between language and reality and so gave no account of truth.<sup>39</sup> However, the truthmaker approach allowed one to speak of correspondence as the relation of *making true* that holds between truthmakers and truth-bearers without following Field in attempting to elucidate these relations by giving a ‘substantial’ account of reference. Moreover, as in more traditional approaches to correspondence, the truthmaking approach sees correspondence as an internal relation; it is part of the nature of the truthmaker that it makes certain truth-bearers true. The goal of what we can call the truthmaker project, then, is to give a systematic account of these truthmakers that not only individuates entities capable of performing the truthmaking role, but tells us which truthmakers make which truth-bearers true.<sup>40</sup>

Truthmaker theorists, for the most part, share the intuition that truths are true in virtue of something extra-linguistic, often quoting David Lewis’s slogan that truth supervenes on being. Read weakly, as the claim that things being as they are entails that some truth-bearers are true and others false, this slogan is harmless. However, the truthmaker project usually has something stronger in mind. Regardless of what truthmakers are taken to be,<sup>41</sup> the project usually relies on some version of what is generally called the Truthmaker Principle.<sup>42</sup> Versions of this principle are stronger and weaker claims to the effect that the truth of truth-bearers is entailed or necessitated by the existence of some *thing*.<sup>43</sup> For example, the strong version of this claim is that every truth requires such a truthmaker. A more moderate version is reminiscent of logical atomism. Only the atomic truths require truthmakers, while the truth of molecular truths is accounted for truth-functionally. A more sophisticated, and more plausible, principle has been suggested by John Bigelow: ‘If something is true, then *there must be*, that is to say, there must *exist*, something which

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<sup>38</sup> Mulligan, Simons and Smith 1984 and Fox 1987 both offer illuminating historical comments about truthmakers. It should be recorded that the resurgence of interest in truthmaking in Australian philosophy, and consequently in the thought of Lewis and Mellor, is at least in part traceable to C. B. Martin’s convincing D. M. Armstrong of the slogan ‘No truth without a truthmaker’.

<sup>39</sup> Mulligan et al. 1984: 288f.

<sup>40</sup> For reasons of space we are forced to ignore an alternative approach to the truthmaker project defended by Taylor 1976 and 1985, Barwise and Perry 1983, and Forbes 1986. In contrast to the metaphysical approach canvassed here, the alternative approach attempts to extend standard semantic theories so that facts are treated as the semantic values of sentences.

<sup>41</sup> These things are not necessarily facts, but often facts are taken as what makes at least some truths true. Other suggested truthmakers include ordinary objects and property tokens (tropes). Armstrong (1997) is a strong supporter of the role of facts or states-of-affairs as truthmakers. Mulligan et al. (1984) argue for ‘moments’ or tropes as truthmakers.

<sup>42</sup> We say ‘usually’ because Mellor, for example, allows that there can be contingent truthmaking and so would not subscribe to any version of the Truthmaker Principle. Mellor 2004: 10f.

<sup>43</sup> We have borrowed this way of introducing the truthmaker project from Forrest and Khlentzos 2000.

makes the actual world different from how it would have been if this had not been true'.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, it is no part of any of these principles that each truth has its own unique truthmaker. Even on the strongest version of the Truthmaker Principle, as long as each truth-bearer has some truthmaker, it is allowable that some truth-bearers share the same truthmaker. This allows the truthmaker project to avoid the worry that truthmakers are the mere shadows of truth-bearers.

If we accept some version of the Truthmaker Principle, it looks as if it is a short step from there to a correspondence theory of truth. On this view the correspondence relation has become the relation or relations of *making true*. In discovering the truthmakers for different truths (and this may well include empirical or scientific discoveries) we can discover the different sorts of relations that hold between truth-bearers and truthmakers and thus gain insight into the nature of truth.<sup>45</sup> In this way, the principle promises to save a rather strong version of correspondence. In particular, after Strawson it seemed that the truth of propositions is a trivial matter and that if the correspondence theory is to have a chance it must take sentences as its truth-bearers. Yet the truthmaker project promises to make correspondence plausible even for propositions. Even better, this approach is in no way wedded to the idea that truths somehow mirror or are isomorphic with the things that make them true. All that is required is that, for a truthmaker T and a proposition p, the proposition that T exists entails p.

But the correspondence theory is not so easily rescued from its historical difficulties, for the truthmaker project still has the worry of negative and universal truths. D. H. Mellor avoids these problems by abandoning the idea that truthmakers must necessitate the truth of the truth-bearer, and by following the *Tractatus*, allowing that truth-functional constructions, including true negations, do not require complex truthmakers.<sup>46</sup> But, as Mellor is aware, such a move severs the truthmaker project from the correspondence project.<sup>47</sup> Bigelow's version of the Truthmaker Principle allows for a similar neat answer to the problem of universal truths, but at the same cost. He suggests that 'All ravens are black' is true not because there is some general fact, but because for that statement to be false something that does not exist (i.e. a non-black raven) would have had to exist. The sole alternative account of universal propositions available to a truthmaker theorist would otherwise appear to be Ramsey's: they are not *propositions*, but rules, and hence not truth-apt at all.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bigelow 1988: 126.

<sup>45</sup> Drew Khlentzos (2000: 116), following Stephen Read, has suggested a way of getting a correspondence theory from the Truthmaker Principle: The principle in its strong form says that if a truth-bearer is true there is some existing thing that makes it true. If some existing thing makes a truth-bearer true, then the truth-bearer is true. Hence, a truth-bearer is true *if and only if* there is some existing thing that makes it true. That is, there is an internal connection between the truth of the truth-bearer and the existence of the truthmaker

<sup>46</sup> The contrast between Wittgenstein and Russell is striking, the latter admitting as truthmakers negative facts (1918: 187-90) and universal facts (ibid. 207), but drawing the line at disjunctive facts (ibid. 185).

<sup>47</sup> Mellor would not be worried by such a consequence. He argues, as we shall, that the truthmaker project should not be construed as a contribution to the theory of truth (Mellor 2004: 2).

<sup>48</sup> Ramsey 1929: 237f.

The truthmaker project also has some difficulty accounting for necessary truth because everything is such that the proposition that it exists necessitates every necessary truth. To prevent these truths being made true by the entire universe, there will need to be some principle of relevance limiting what can count as truthmakers, e.g. the project might be restricted to contingent truths. However, the problem of relevance arises even for these.<sup>49</sup> In an argument with the same conclusion as the slingshot, Greg Restall has shown that, if we think of entailment in the standard way, we can derive the claim that all truths have the same truthmaker. To avoid this we need to appeal to some other sort of entailment or necessitation, one that can limit necessitation to relevant truthmakers, if we are to have a plausible version of the Truthmaker Principle.

But why should we believe the principle in the first place? In particular, why should we suppose that there must always be some *thing* that makes truths true? Perhaps truthmaker theorists should reduce the demand for existents by following Denis Robinson's slightly weakened version of Bigelow's expression of the principle:

... every contingent truth supervenes on the natures of things, in the sense that it could not have been false without some difference, either in what exists, or in what qualities and relations existing things have.

(Robinson 2000: 148)

But this version, in eschewing talk of things that make truths true, is acceptable even to a redundancy theorist and so seems to carry no consequences for the theory of truth at all. Furthermore, it is not clear why the instances of the equivalence schema should not provide enough for the theory of truthmakers. After all, they tell us the conditions under which the truth-bearer will be true; and Mellor claims that the equivalence principle is 'the only theory of truth which truthmaker theorists need'.<sup>50</sup> But, he adds, if we use the equivalence schema to guide us to truthmakers themselves then we will be led astray. One instance of the schema will be (20):

(20) The proposition that my mirror image is waving is true iff my mirror image is waving.

However, it surely is not the case that what makes the statement true is that there is some thing, my mirror image, that is waving. The right hand side of the biconditional tells us only the truth-conditions of the truth-bearer and mentions nothing about the metaphysical or physical structure of the world at all.<sup>51</sup> But it is the latter with which the truthmaker project, as Mellor conceives it, is concerned.

If instances of the equivalence schema tell us truth-conditions without telling us about truthmakers, then Mellor is right to suggest that the truthmaker project has nothing to do with the theory of truth; and *a fortiori* on the Field-Davidson assumption that a theory of truth is a theory of truth-conditions, for, as can be seen from (20), the theory of truthmaking is separate from, and posterior to, a theory of truth-conditions. Moreover,

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<sup>49</sup> Restall 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Mellor 2004: 2.

<sup>51</sup> Though it may misleadingly suggest some such thing. One of us can recall being baffled in a school physics class by being told of a plane mirror, 'The image is as far behind the mirror as the object is in front.' This attribution of (apparent) properties of the imaged object to another entity, the image itself, is very common; it still bedevils discussion of mental imagery, by both psychologists and philosophers.

Lewis has a further argument to the same conclusion, in the form of a dilemma for correspondence theorists concerning their conception of facts.<sup>52</sup> On one horn, facts are conceived of as true propositions. Yet, Lewis argued, such a conception reduces the correspondence relation to something acceptable to a redundancy theorist. On the other horn is facts conceived as states-of-affairs, a conception belonging to the approach that conjoins a correspondence theory with the truthmaker project. However, Lewis pointed out, the Truthmaker Principle has (21) as an instance:

(21) It's true that cats purr iff there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that cats purr.

If we accept the equivalence schema then this entails (22):

(22) Cats purr iff there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that cats purr.

Yet (22) is not about truth. It is about 'the existential grounding of the purring of cats'. But if (22) is equivalent to (21), Lewis argued, then (21) is, despite appearances, not about truth either. He goes on to say that the appearance of 'true' in the various instances of the Truthmaker Principle like (21) seems to be a result merely of its role as a device of generalization; his argument is accordingly much like that which Grover et al. and Leeds used against the claim that truth plays an explanatory role. This general sort of argument puts great pressure on the claim that the truthmaker project supports a correspondence theory of truth, suggesting rather it is one of telling us what truthmaking is, what kinds of entities truthmakers are, and what propositions need them (as Mellor claims). This is reminiscent of one of Russell's logical construction programmes, that whose aim was to show how the truth of everyday propositions is grounded in the restricted class of entities recognized within the preferred epistemological and metaphysical framework.

But Lewis's argument seems to depend on the claim that the equivalence schema expresses an *intensional* equivalence. Only on this assumption is it obvious that the fact that (22) is not about truth entails that (21) is not about truth either. However, if we accept that the equivalence is intensional, then related arguments can be constructed that threaten to destroy all theories of truth bar the deflationary. For, as Alston and Lewis both point out,<sup>53</sup> if a theory of truth is meant as a conceptual analysis of truth, or is even meant to be an *a priori* thesis about truth, then it runs into trouble in the presence of the *a priori* equivalence schema. This is particularly obvious in the case of epistemic theories such as that which claims that it is *a priori* that a statement is true iff it is ideally justified. The appropriate instance of the equivalence schema entails that (23) is equivalent to (24):

(23) The proposition that cats purr is true iff the proposition that cats purr is ideally justified.

(24) Cats purr iff the proposition that cats purr is ideally justified.

So, we are forced to conclude that (24) is also *a priori* true, when it plainly is not.<sup>54</sup> The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for any *a priori* correspondence theory that takes

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<sup>52</sup> Lewis 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis 2001: 275; Alston 1996: 208-14. Lewis's argument has since been challenged (Vision 2003).

<sup>54</sup> In effect, this is a formalization of Frege's and Bradley's transparency argument to the conclusion that any analysis of truth must fail. It is also strongly reminiscent of Russell's objection to pragmatism that it implies that in determining the truth of the belief that God exists we should find out whether it is useful to believe that God exists, rather than whether God exists (see §1.4).

utterances as truth-bearers, as it surely false that cats purr only if someone has made an appropriate utterance. The only correspondence theory capable of avoiding this difficulty is one which takes propositions as truth-bearers, but, if Lewis's previous argument is correct, such a theory is not one of truth at all.

### 3.5 Neopragmatism: Davidson, Putnam, Rorty

For pragmatists, investigating the truthmaking relation, whether as an attempt to elucidate truth or as part of some other metaphysical project, is a wrongheaded way of doing philosophy. The hunt for truthmakers seems to them an effort to get a God's eye view, from outside all contingent conceptual schemes, of the relations between language and reality. In the last few decades of the twentieth century a number of philosophers, most notably Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, joined the pragmatists in expressing suspicion about both appeals to truthmakers and attempts to obtain such a God's eye view. And while none of these philosophers, ultimately, endorsed the Jamesian slogan that truth is what is useful, they shared an approach to, and theses about, the nature of truth that justifies the label 'Neopragmatist'. In particular, each pursued the pragmatist goal of breaking down traditional distinctions which they took to have no pragmatic significance, such as those between subjective and objective, value and fact, analytic and synthetic, conceptual scheme and reality, justification and truth. Their inherited pragmatist distaste for these distinctions led them likewise to attempt to simultaneously dissolve the traditional set of problems about realism and truth. But the neopragmatists (ultimately) tried to achieve this by finding a way *between* correspondence and epistemic theories of truth.<sup>55</sup>

This scepticism about truthmaking and the truth/justification distinction leads them to reject a claim that has guided much of the thought about truth in the twentieth century, including, curiously enough, that of the pragmatists themselves. The claim is the familiar one that truth is a norm of assertion or a goal of inquiry. Davidson has succinctly expressed the divergence from the pragmatists on this point:

From the fact that we will never be able to tell which of our beliefs are true, the pragmatists conclude that we may as well identify our best researched, most successful, beliefs with the true ones, and give up the idea of objectivity ... I agree with the pragmatists that we cannot consistently take truth to be both objective and something to be pursued. But I think they would have done better to cleave to a view that counts truth as objective, but pointless as a goal.

(Davidson 2000: 67<sup>56</sup>)

On this view, although truth may be a central concept in our explanations of others, it plays no role in guiding our actions.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, however, according to Ramsey's

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<sup>55</sup> For reasons of space, we shall focus only on views shared by all of them and note the differences of opinion in passing. Also, Davidson and Putnam both changed their minds quite significantly even after they began defending neopragmatism. We have tried to present the most considered versions of their views, and largely ignore those they abandoned over this period.

<sup>56</sup> As Davidson notes, Rorty strangely seems to be suspicious of both the distinction between justification and truth and the claim that truth cannot be a goal of inquiry. However, we think that Rorty distinguishes truth from justification for some purposes, including those Davidson himself points out. See Davidson 2000: 74, fn. 3.

success semantics, truth can be treated both as objective and still a goal, in the sense that the utility of true beliefs means that if one wants a belief about P at all (i.e. 'P' or '~P'), one will prefer the true one and will assess the methods of getting such beliefs accordingly.

Despite this divergence, neopragmatists join the original pragmatists in rejecting the common correspondentist claim that epistemically ideal theories might nevertheless be false. Davidson, for example, argues that we need to use a principle of charity in interpreting others which implies that our interpretations must make as many of their beliefs come out true as possible. Hence, he claims, there is no possibility of any thinker's being *radically* mistaken. Putnam, on the other hand, argued that for any system of belief which is claimed to be radically mistaken there is an equally legitimate, alternative interpretation according to which the beliefs are true. Nor does he allow that we can fix the reference of our terms, and thus ensure a standard interpretation according to which the beliefs are mostly false, by ascending to a meta-language to speak of any causal or referential relations holding between our language and reality. According to Putnam, hoping that we could make such a move is hoping for an ascent to a God's eye view; the reason we cannot so ascend is that our words 'cause' and 'refer' themselves stand in need of interpretation and they too can be provided with an innumerable array of satisfactory interpretations;<sup>58</sup> further, these theories of reference are just more theory requiring an interpretation.

This line of thought lies behind Putnam's famous model-theoretic argument, whose aim was to show the incoherence of even Fieldian fact-free correspondence theories.<sup>59</sup> Putnam relied on the idea of a plurality of reference schemes to conclude that for any language there are innumerable interpretations that will result in the same sentences' being assigned not only the same truth-values, but the same truth-conditions. Adding the assumption that only the truth-conditions of sentences constrain an interpretation of a speaker leads to the conclusion that there is no standard interpretation of a language. Putnam thought that this conclusion is absurd, and that, for reasons that are obscure to us, a semantics based on the idea that truth is ideal justification is the only way to avoid it. Nevertheless, if his basic line of thought is correct, there cannot be a physicalistically respectable account of reference of the sort Field was after because there is no standard reference relation to reduce.<sup>60</sup> The model-theoretic argument, however, is as controversial as the Dummettian anti-realist arguments that inspired it. In particular, Lewis has

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen Stich has offered an argument against the idea that truth is worth striving for that has much in common with the model-theoretic argument discussed below. He argues that if we agree that there is no standard interpretation of our language, and likewise no standard way of attributing content to our mental states, then it is hard to see why we would want belief states that are true according to one interpretation rather than some other interpretation (Stich 1990: ch. 5).

<sup>58</sup> Davidson 1979: 234f. Putnam 1978: 126.

<sup>59</sup> Putnam's 1978 begins with an extended response to Field, and ends with the argument (pp. 123-38). See also Putnam 1980 and 1983a: 32-5. A very similar argument can be found in Davidson 1979. Putnam is attacking what he calls 'metaphysical realism', a combination of metaphysical and semantic doctrines, but any anti-realist conclusion comes via the following undermining of the Fieldian notion of correspondence.

<sup>60</sup> Neopragmatists also claim that this argument undermines realism, but Stephen Leeds (1978) shows how one could combine the neopragmatist view of reference schemes with realism.

diagnosed the argument's persuasiveness as depending on overlooking the difference between two different ideas: one, that constraints on interpretations are merely more theory, itself requiring interpretation; the other, that they are constraints to which any overall interpretation of our language must conform.<sup>61</sup>

However, even if this argument fails, the neopragmatists have a more fundamental reason for rejecting Fieldian correspondence theories – their meaning holism. For example, Davidson's principle of charity is clearly a holistic constraint on interpretation, requiring an interpreter to consider the whole range of beliefs being attributed to a speaker in attributing any particular belief to them.<sup>62</sup> While Putnam and Rorty deny that formal, Davidsonian theories of meaning are possible, they are also committed to meaning holism based on a holism about interpretation.<sup>63</sup> This method of interpretation allows the extension of the reference relation to fall out in whatever way(s) supports the original attributions of content to sentences. Consequently, the neopragmatists do not suppose that the concept of reference need, or could, be reduced to physicalistically respectable concepts. They see 'reference' as a purely theoretical term that gets all its meaning from the way it contributes to the truth theory.<sup>64</sup>

On noting their arguments against correspondence, it seems natural to suppose that the neopragmatists would hold some epistemic theory of truth. Indeed, despite at one time defending correspondence theories of truth, both Putnam and Davidson have professed allegiance to epistemic theories,<sup>65</sup> while Rorty once endorsed a Peircean notion of truth. In fact, in the mid 1980s it seemed to many that the three of them were united by an anti-realist metaphysics and an epistemic theory of truth. Yet, later, all three either recanted or clarified their position to avoid such attributions.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the neopragmatists have suggested numerous reasons for rejecting epistemic theories. One such reason is that if truth were an epistemic notion then truth could be lost. In other words, because sentences or propositions can be justified at one time and unjustified at another, any theory that built justification into its definition of truth would allow that a truth-bearer could change in truth-value without changing in meaning. This flies in the face of another alleged platitude about truth, namely that truth is stable. Such an argument can be countered, however, by moving, as Putnam did, to a notion of truth as ideal justification.<sup>67</sup> A more serious argument flows from the simple and intuitive claim that statements can be justified and yet not true, i.e., that truth is recognition-transcendent. Putnam's acknowledgement of this point has led to his abandonment of epistemic views and a

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<sup>61</sup> Lewis 1984. For further criticism on behalf of the realist see Devitt 1991. On behalf of the anti-realist see van Fraassen 1997. Hale and Wright (1997) provide helpful discussion.

<sup>62</sup> Davidson 1984.

<sup>63</sup> Putnam 1983b: xvii. Rorty clearly expresses his misgivings about Davidsonian talk of truth-conditions in Rorty 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Davidson's 1977 spells this out. The first three chapters of Putnam 1978 echo the Davidsonian response to Field, as does McDowell 1978.

<sup>65</sup> Contrast Davidson 1969 with Davidson 1986, and Putnam 1960 with Putnam 1983a.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson 1990: 302, fn. 40; Putnam 1994. Rorty 1982: 165 represents such an endorsement (see Rorty 1986: 328, where he retracts it).

<sup>67</sup> Putnam 1983a: 55.

return to ‘common-sense realism’.<sup>68</sup> Yet, as Wright has argued, it is not clear that one needs to give up an epistemic view of truth to agree that truth can be recognition-transcendent.<sup>69</sup>

It seems that there are in fact two basic reasons that the neopragmatists have for rejecting epistemic views. The first is that they are associated with anti-realism and the neopragmatists set out to dispel the appearance of a binary choice between realism and anti-realism by showing that it is based on a mistaken distinction between conceptual schemes and reality.<sup>70</sup> Like the pragmatists, neopragmatists deny that there is some way in which the world is structured independently of the language we use to describe it. This is not meant to imply that we are free to invent the world as we please. That would be to suppose that we are trapped inside our conceptual scheme with reality forever outside. Against that idea, the neopragmatists suggest that this idealism is a result not of abandoning the distinction between scheme and content, but of merely favouring one side of that distinction.<sup>71</sup> What they aim for is a way between these two views, a sort of direct realism that puts us in touch with reality without any representational proxies or intermediaries such as a conceptual scheme.<sup>72</sup> And they see the theory of truth as a key ground on which to fight this battle. While it is not at all clear that theories of truth are relevant to this debate, it *is* clear that they have been taken to be so throughout the century. So, to the extent that the neopragmatists wish to deflate or dissolve this debate, it may well be the right dialectical strategy to undermine traditional conceptions of the problems surrounding truth.

The other reason neopragmatists have for rejecting epistemic views is that they endorse the claim that truth cannot be defined. Even as Putnam was putting forward his most epistemic view of truth, he conjoined his remarks with the proviso that ‘I am not trying to give a formal definition of truth, but an informal elucidation of the notion.’<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, both he and Davidson have often claimed that Tarski has shown us that we cannot provide a consistent definition of truth within our own language. Indeed, Davidson has famously claimed that it is ‘folly’ to attempt any such definition, as the history of failures to do so bears witness.<sup>74</sup> Instead, he thought, the best we can do is draw out the relations between truth and other semantic and non-semantic concepts. This is what his theory of interpretation is meant to do. By showing how applying a truth-theory to a community requires attributing beliefs and desires and recognizing causal relations between their beliefs and the world, he hoped to elucidate the role truth plays in our

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<sup>68</sup> Putnam 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Wright 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Davidson was the first of the neopragmatists to attack this distinction (Davidson 1974).

<sup>71</sup> Rorty 1986: 326. Rorty rightly insists that Davidson avoids any such epistemic conception of truth and endorses this stance himself.

<sup>72</sup> ‘In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false’ (Davidson 1974: 198). Putnam’s ‘internal realism’ is best seen as an attempt to reach a similar position. Cf., e.g., Putnam 1996.

<sup>73</sup> Putnam 1983a: 57.

<sup>74</sup> This is the gist of Davidson 1996, and is partly reflected in its title.

explanatory theories of their behaviour.<sup>75</sup> In this way, Davidson attempted to combine the neopragmatist position with primitivism.<sup>76</sup>

Along with the indefinability thesis, Putnam and Davidson share a deflationary attitude without accepting deflationary theories of truth.<sup>77</sup> Davidson sees these theories as yet another attempt to give a definition of truth. Putnam worries that they are committed to a verificationist theory of understanding that cannot allow for a recognition-transcendent conception of truth. Rorty, on the other hand, is far more sympathetic to deflationary theories, seeing in them the hope of dissolving a range of traditional metaphysical and epistemological debates. However, it is not clear that the disagreement here is substantial. Rorty agrees that truth is a property and he also seems to hold Davidson's view that it plays an important explanatory role in theories of interpretation.<sup>78</sup> As will emerge below, and despite Davidson's worry that deflationists try to define 'true', this means that Rorty too can accept primitivism. As for Putnam, he has conceded that truth is not a substantial property while also implying that truth is so variegated that it will evade definition. It seems, then, that, despite their internal squabbles, the neopragmatists combine a deflationary attitude towards truth with primitivism's central claim of its indefinability. We shall see that they share this resting point with a number of other theorists.

### *3.6 Functionalism and pluralism: Putnam, Rorty, Wiggins, Wright*

Yet there is another strain of thought in the neopragmatists that we have so far not considered. There are several different, and not obviously compatible, conclusions one might draw from the purported failure of attempts to discover the nature of truth. One is that there is no nature that requires discovery (deflationism). Another is that truth is unanalysable (primitivism). A third is that there is no *one* property or concept of truth to discover (pluralism). Putnam's turn to 'common-sense realism', for example, was accompanied by an emphasis on the heterogeneous nature of the range of discourses we go in for (ethical, scientific, mathematical, comic ...). Moreover, Putnam counselled, we should not hope for one 'free-standing' explanation of truth that would tell us once and for all what truth is, what a proposition is and what it is for an assertion to be correct.<sup>79</sup> Rather, there are many ways to make a correct assertion and so many ways to correspond to reality.

Rorty, too, has long – indeed, notoriously – urged the pluralist nature of truth. Crucial to his view that truth is not a goal of inquiry is the claim that there is not one goal (Truth-with-a capital-'T', i.e. correspondence with reality) at which all discourses aim. Rather, each has its own standards of justification and correctness, and its own way of 'fitting'

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<sup>75</sup> See the last section of Davidson 1990 for an elaboration of this point.

<sup>76</sup> Davidson 1996: 309 and 320ff.

<sup>77</sup> Davidson and Putnam explicitly criticized deflationism and, in particular, Tarski's view read in a deflationary way. See Davidson 1990: section 1, and Putnam 1988: 60-71.

<sup>78</sup> The first few sentences of the introduction to Rorty 1982, make it clear that Rorty is happy to treat truth as a property. Although in 1986 he insisted that truth was not an explanatory property, he later retracted this claim, emphasizing that he had never meant to deny that truth played a role in a Davidsonian empirical theory of meaning (Rorty 1995: 282, fn. 23).

<sup>79</sup> Putnam 1994: 513ff. His position shows the influence of Wittgenstein (1953).

reality.<sup>80</sup> This tolerance of different discourses is the basis for Rorty's notoriety, for it suggests an 'anything goes' relativism about both justification and truth. Indeed, he professes a longing for a society that has given up the obsession with truth.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Rorty is attacking merely what he conceives as bad, old truth-with-a-capital-'T': he does not pine for a discourse free of the predicate 'true', a predicate with both an endorsing and a cautionary use (to warn that even if the proposition that snow is white is justified it might still be that snow is not white), and which does not express a substantial property.<sup>82</sup> Thus perhaps he can still allow, and even encourage, the quest to determine whether snow really is white, a subject which one might be forgiven for supposing is a matter of obsession with philosophers.

David Wiggins has also expressed sympathy with pluralism, suggesting a way of developing Davidson's theory of meaning so that we can obtain some sort of pluralist truth theory.<sup>83</sup> He agreed with Davidson that, because of the way truth is related to fact-stating discourse, there must be more to truth than a deflationary reading of Tarski can offer. Yet he also felt the force of Strawson's attack on the notion of facts. Like Field, Wiggins thus wondered how one could provide the sort of substantial theory of truth that was required. He began his attempt with the Davidsonian claim that a theory of truth for a language will serve as a theory of meaning, provided that it meets an anthropological constraint that it make the best sense of the speakers of the language. Accordingly, he thought that to discover the nature of truth we should consider what features any property must have, if it is to serve as the central notion in a theory of meaning so constrained. Wiggins hoped that he could give a functional analysis of the concept of truth by uncovering the relations between such a notion and the anthropological constraint. Inspired by the Ramsey-Lewis approach to defining theoretical terms, he argued that truth would be whichever property satisfied that functional analysis obtained by considering the role any concept must play if it is to be the central concept in the theory of meaning.<sup>84</sup> Unsurprisingly, we have already met, many times, the essential 'marks of truth' which Wiggins claimed to discover: truth is a norm of assertion, recognition-transcendent, and satisfies the correspondence intuition.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, like Davidson, Wiggins contented himself with elaborating the connections amongst truth and other key semantic concepts. He also agreed that one should not try to step outside our linguistic practices in defining truth. However, Wiggins's development of the Davidsonian project lies in the realization that, despite the holistic nature of interpretation, and even, perhaps, despite the irreducibility of the semantic to the physical, one could use this functional analysis to offer a definition of truth. This may not be pluralistic: the functional analysis may be detailed enough to ensure that there is one unique property that fulfils the job description. But the project is consistent with the thought that a number of properties might fit the bill. If one attempts to apply the

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<sup>80</sup> See, in particular, the introduction to Rorty 1982.

<sup>81</sup> Rorty 1995: 277ff.

<sup>82</sup> Rorty 1986.

<sup>83</sup> Wiggins 1980.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* 203f.

<sup>85</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of Wiggins's marks of truth.

Davidsonian analysis to a range of discourses, including those that we might doubt are fact-stating, then the pluralistic conclusion may seem even more likely. Perhaps, as Putnam and Rorty suggest, different discourses relate to reality in different ways and so would require a different property to fill the truth role. Something much like this view has been championed by Crispin Wright.

Wright was inspired to develop his account of truth by his disenchantment with the available ways of expressing anti-realism about the subject matters of different types of discourse. He thought it obvious that it was a mistake to suppose, for example, that anti-realism about the humorous meant that statements about the comic are not capable of being true or false. Following Dummett, he argued that it is not a matter of whether such statements are capable of being true or false, but whether the point of assigning truth-values would be served by assigning them to these statements. This idea led him to a ‘minimal’ notion of truth that he considers metaphysically ‘light-weight’ (Wright’s expressions) and consequently able to serve as a notion neutral between realists and anti-realists.<sup>86</sup> Like Wiggins, Wright puts forward a number of ‘marks of truth’ that serve to define the concept. But he does not find these marks by considering the theory of meaning, but by uncovering platitudes about truth – claims concerning truth that we all know *a priori* and thus serve to provide an ‘analytical theory of the concept’.<sup>87</sup> Chief among these is the equivalence thesis. In a deflationary spirit, Wright argues that many of Wiggins’s ‘marks of truth’ (including the correspondence platitude and the claim that truth is a distinct norm from justification) can be accounted for by any predicate that satisfies this thesis.<sup>88</sup> The platitudes that are uncovered, according to Wright, serve to define a unique concept. Furthermore, he claims, this concept is so light-weight that any assertoric discourse at all, any discourse with an appropriate syntax and constraints on assertibility, will be truth-apt. That is, its declarative sentences will be appropriately assigned truth-values.

One might think that in attempting to show that such a wide range of discourses are truth-apt, Wright was hoping to support the pragmatist cause of dissolving the debate between realism and anti-realism. However, he had quite the opposite goal in mind. Again following Dummett, he argued that this debate is actually a series of local skirmishes and should be seen as a matter of determining what sort of truth-predicate is appropriate for a particular discourse. Thus, although Wright maintains that he can uncover the essential nature of the concept of truth for all discourses, he insists that there may be different properties satisfying the platitudes for different discourses. In particular, he argues that *superassertibility* can play the truth role he has demarcated:

A statement is superassertible, then, if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrary close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information.

(Wright 1992: 48)

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<sup>86</sup> Wright 1992: 11f.

<sup>87</sup> Wright 1999: 228.

<sup>88</sup> Wright 1992: 74, fn 2.

Given that superassertibility is clearly an epistemic property, he concludes that this can serve as the anti-realist's notion of truth. Moreover, the burden is now on the realist to show that in some discourse the property of truth goes beyond superassertibility, and is in no way evidentially constrained.

Wright is explicit that what accounts for the metaphysically light-weight nature of truth is not that he relies only on a set of *platitudes* about truth, but that the notion can be defined for any assertoric discourse. Yet, by his own admission, he offers no argument for the claim that truth can be so defined.<sup>89</sup> But if one agrees with Jackson et al. that a minimal theory of truth does not entail a minimal theory of truth-aptness,<sup>90</sup> one is left wondering why we should accept that all these discourses are truth-apt and thus why we should think of the realist/anti-realist debate as one concerning which property is the realizer for the truth-predicate in a discourse. Another cause for hesitation about Wright's project concerns his suggestion that his pluralism is the only means by which one can understand both sides in the realist/anti-realist debate. A plausible alternative, however, is that although there is only one notion and property of truth, which can be functionally defined, different types of statements have different types of truth-conditions. Some of these truth-conditions may be satisfied independently of our existence and constitution, others may not.<sup>91</sup> If this is a plausible alternative way to such understanding, then the necessity of appealing to pluralism evaporates.

### 3.7 Contemporary deflationism: Field, Horwich, Kripke, Soames

Despite the name, Wright's minimalism is not helpfully categorized as a deflationary theory of truth. Although it promises to deliver what he called a light-weight notion of truth, one neutral between realism and anti-realism, it allows that truth might be, for some discourses at least, the sort of property correspondence theorists claim it is. Moreover, Wright claims that determining the notion of truth that is appropriate for a certain discourse is crucial to deciding the realist/anti-realist debate for that local discourse. None of this looks compatible with the deflationary theories so far examined. Nor does Wright's theory belong with the paradigm examples of inflationary accounts – correspondence and epistemic theories. Yet, while a number of positions are similar to Wright's in belonging comfortably in neither camp, by the early 1990s, there was a growing consensus that the most important debate in the theory of truth (and content) was the fundamental one between inflationists and deflationists.<sup>92</sup>

The consensus was fuelled, in part, by the powerful defences of deflationary theories offered by Scott Soames, Hartry Field, and Paul Horwich. Their views depart from most earlier deflationary theories in abandoning the claims that 'true' is not a predicate and does not express a property. However, they upheld a number of doctrines which place them squarely in the deflationist tradition. For one, although both deflationists and

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* 74.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson, Oppy and Smith 1994.

<sup>91</sup> Pettit 1996 suggests this alternative position.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Boghossian (1990: 165, fn. 17): 'Whether truth is robust or deflationary is the biggest decision a theorist of truth must make.' See also Field 1994: 107.

inflationists can agree that ‘... is true’ plays a certain logical or expressive role, the contemporary deflationist maintains that the *only* reason for having the concept of truth is to allow us to meet this ‘logical need’, that is, truth attributions are not descriptive.<sup>93</sup> They do not play their important role by attributing some common characteristic to a truth-bearer, but by serving as a device of disquotation. Another central feature of contemporary deflationism is its commitment to the claim that there is nothing general to be said about the property of truth. Rather truth is such that we grasp, in its entirety, what it is for a particular truth-bearer to be true by grasping the relevant instance of the equivalence thesis: a thesis that also serves, in some sense, to give the meaning of ‘... is true’. Finally, it is also worth emphasizing an important *conception* of deflationary theories. Some have worried (others, like Rorty, have hoped) that they will have startling philosophical consequences, including the idea that there is no meta-theoretical standpoint from which to assess our theories of reality and so to decide important metaphysical questions. Contemporary deflationists, however, standardly see their theories as having no deep consequences for metaphysics or epistemology; these topics must be separated from the task of providing a theory of truth. As Soames plaintively remarks, ‘Throughout the history of philosophy, the notion of truth has occupied a corner into which all manner of problems and confusions have been swept.’<sup>94</sup>

Field largely based his case for a correspondence theory on the, usually implicit, premiss that truth plays a causal-explanatory role. However, the deflationist response developed by Leeds and Grover et al. convinced him that showing that truth played such a role was exceptionally difficult to do.<sup>95</sup> He thus reconceived the debate about truth as a question of whether, for practical or theoretical purposes, we need to appeal to more than a disquotationalist account. In 1986 he tentatively came down on the side of correspondence. In 1994, and on a number of later occasions, he defended disquotationalism against a number of standard objections, but largely left the issue of truth’s causal-explanatory role to one side. The reason for this postponement is that, as previously noted (§3.1), Field sees the crucial issue for a theory of truth as being the question of what determines that utterances have the truth-conditions they do. This meant that, for him, the most important issue between inflationists and deflationists is whether any of our causal explanations makes an ineliminable appeal to the truth-conditions of utterances or belief states. But as Field says, it is a ‘big job even to state the worry clearly, and a bigger job to answer it; I must save this for another occasion.’<sup>96</sup> So must we.

However, Field’s position must be characterized as deflationism about meaning and content, which is *thereby* deflationism about truth. Deflationism about content is stipulated as being the position that truth-conditions do not play a central (and thus causal-explanatory) role in the theory of content. And he holds that the best way of developing a theory in which neither truth, nor reference and satisfaction, plays such a central role, is to provide disquotational theories of all three. At first, he championed

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<sup>93</sup> This way of putting the point is Horwich’s (1998a: 138).

<sup>94</sup> Soames 1999: 255.

<sup>95</sup> See the postscripts to chs 1 and 4 in Field 2001.

<sup>96</sup> Field 1994: 127.

what he called ‘pure-disquotationalism’ about truth.<sup>97</sup> According to this view, for all utterances *p*, the assertion of ‘*p* is true’ is “cognitively equivalent” to the assertion of *p*. This claim has a number of odd features that the Field of 1972 would have found repugnant. The first is that the truth-predicate applies only to utterances we can understand. For if we cannot understand *p* then, because of the *cognitive* equivalence, we will not understand ‘*p* is true’ either. The second odd feature is also found in Quine’s disquotationalism: sentence-tokens have their truth-conditions necessarily.<sup>98</sup> However, Field argued, this second characteristic is actually a virtue. If we want to describe the nature of space, we can use a truth-predicate and say, perhaps, that all the axioms of Euclidean geometry are true of the space we inhabit. In this case, he suggests, we want, not to make a claim dependent on what certain sentences of English mean, but rather to speak directly about reality. And only a notion of truth for which ‘*p*’ and “‘*p*’ is true’ are cognitively equivalent can allow this.<sup>99</sup> We will return to this point below, but it is anyway clear that our ordinary notion of truth does not share these features. Field, aware of this, proposed that we try to do without the ordinary notion until it can be shown that it serves some purpose beyond those which can be served by a purely disquotational substitute.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, more recently Field has come to accept a more moderate version of disquotationalism he calls ‘quasi-disquotationalism’, according to which a notion of translation is built into the understanding of truth; he offers the following definition of quasi-disquotational truth:

If *S* is translatable as ‘*p*’, then, necessarily, (*S* is true iff *p*).<sup>101</sup>

However, he now insists that we individuate sentence-tokens not orthographically, but computationally. That is, two sentence-tokens are equivalent for an individual iff they are treated computationally as equivalent by that individual. This means that sentence-tokens are not capable of being shared across individuals, or within the same individual across possible worlds. Field’s account can thus now capture the intuition that sentences have truth-conditions contingently. When we want to attribute truth-conditions to a sentence we must consider which of our actual sentences (individuated computationally) is its translation. Thus ‘Rabbits are furry’ used by a counterpart me (in another possible world) in a radically different fashion from my use of it, might be translated by my computationally-individuated ‘Touch-typing is difficult’ and so share that sentence’s truth-conditions.<sup>102</sup> The account can also allow that, for us, it is indeterminate whether sentences we do not understand are true. This is an improvement on pure disquotationalism’s consequence that such sentences are not true. Finally, if one follows Field in offering a linguistic view of meaning attribution, one can convert the above definition into something that looks a lot like a fully general version of the semantic conception of truth:

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> The clearest exposition of these commitments is in Field 1986: §1.2.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* 58f.

<sup>100</sup> Field proposed that we should be “methodological deflationists”. Field 1994: 119.

<sup>101</sup> Field 2001: 151f.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* 158f.

For any sentence S (of any linguistic community C, in any possible world u), if S means that p (for C, in world u) then S (as used by C in world u) is true (at world w) if and only if p (at w).<sup>103</sup>

The conversion is made possible by supposing that ‘S means that p’ is equivalent to ‘S can be translated by my actual sentence “p” .’

Field’s trajectory in reaching this point highlights the difficulties faced if one endorses a deflationary theory that takes the primary truth-bearers not to be individuated by their meanings. To mimic our ordinary conception of truth we need to build in to the theory the claim that truth is dependent on meaning. Doing this, however, means that one will also need to give a theory of meaning that does not reconstruct the sort of correspondence account he is trying to avoid.

Field himself clearly takes it to be not easy to avoid this error. In fact, he has even accused Soames, who takes himself to endorse a deflationary theory of truth with *propositions* as truth-bearers, of succumbing to it.<sup>104</sup> Thus although Soames has not put forward a theory of truth as such, he provides a problematic case for the distinction between inflationary and deflationary theories and has also made a number of suggestions about the form a deflationary theory should take. His alternative model for a plausible (and deflationary) theory of truth is found in Saul Kripke’s influential ‘Outline of a Theory of Truth’.<sup>105</sup>

Kripke sought to give a formal construction for a truth-predicate that could deal with paradoxical cases like liar sentences as well as ‘ungrounded’ statements such as ‘This sentence is true’. However, motivated by a number of counter-intuitive consequences of Tarski’s hierarchical arrangement of truth-predicates, he wanted his construction to be such that the languages involved contain their own single, univocal truth-predicate. Kripke’s guiding thought for defining such a predicate was that it should capture the intuitive idea that ‘we are entitled to assert (or deny) of any sentence that it is true precisely under the circumstances when we can assert (or deny) the sentence itself’.<sup>106</sup> In order to deal with cases where the sentence itself contains an attribution of truth, he suggests that we can continue to strip away the truth-predicate until we reach a point at which there are no longer any occurrences of ‘true’ in the sentence. Having ascertained whether we can assert (or deny) this sentence, our intuitive conception of truth allows us to ‘re-ascend’ to assert (or deny) the original sentence containing ‘true’. For many sentences, like “‘Snow is white’ is true”, for example, this technique will yield a determinate truth-value. Kripke’s intuitive conception therefore provides the truth-predicate with an extension and an anti-extension. However, for other sentences, including but not restricted to paradoxical sentences, this technique yields no determinate truth-value. We simply cannot trace these sentences, which Kripke calls ‘ungrounded’, back to some ‘true’-free sentence for which we can ascertain that we are entitled to assert (or deny) it. So the anti-extension and extension of the truth-predicate do not together

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* 165.

<sup>104</sup> Field 1986: 66.

<sup>105</sup> Kripke 1975.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* 701.

contain all sentences of the language. As Kripke points out, this means that he has only given a partial interpretation for the truth-predicate. There are a variety of sentences that fall neither in the extension or the anti-extension of the truth-predicate and these are deemed neither true nor false.

Regardless of whether such a proposal really does deal adequately with the paradoxes and related phenomena,<sup>107</sup> Soames sees Kripke's proposal as embodying an important insight: that the problematic cases must be dealt with on the basis of a prior characterization of the truth-predicate.<sup>108</sup> This is not the case with other deflationary proposals. As we shall shortly see, for example, Horwich simply excludes, without explanation, the paradoxical instances of the equivalence schema from the set of instances of the schema that constitute our grasp of the truth concept.

So, the seemingly deflationary nature of Soames's views on truth stems from his conception of theories of truth as primarily concerned with giving an account of the meaning of 'true' that (a) does justice to the equivalence between an attribution of truth to a statement and an assertion of the statement itself, and (b) can also deal adequately with the majority of the uses of the predicate, including those within paradoxical contexts. Yet the question remains as to whether he can prevent his conception of truth from inflating under pressure. One source of pressure is that, as Dummett in effect argued, on pain of circularity deflationists who take propositions as truth-bearers are debarred from accepting any account of propositions that individuates them by their truth-conditions. This constraint rules out a wide range of traditional accounts. Further, much that Soames says about the nature of meaning, in particular, suggests that he endorses what Field would call a 'robust' view of what it takes for a sentence to express a proposition.<sup>109</sup> This fact is what led Field to attribute to Soames an inflationary conception of truth. Yet Soames rejects truth-conditional theories of meaning and so rejects the view that we need a robust theory of what it is for sentences to possess their truth-conditions. Thus it is hard to see why his robust theory of meaning should directly entail a robust theory of truth. This is the sort of difficult case which the usual distinctions between inflationary and deflationary theories fail to clearly categorize.

Like Soames, Horwich attempts to avoid disquotationalism's problems by taking propositions as the primary truth-bearers. He also agrees with Soames and Field that he thus needs to give an account of meaning without making essential use of the notion of truth, so that he cannot provide a truth-conditional theory.<sup>110</sup> However, Horwich takes the equivalence schema as the central plank in his minimal theory. More specifically, he

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<sup>107</sup> The standard view is that the strengthened liar ('This sentence is untrue') defeats Kripke-style treatments.

<sup>108</sup> Soames 1999: 245f.

<sup>109</sup> See in particular Soames 1984 and 1989.

<sup>110</sup> Horwich 1998a: 68ff and 93-103. However, the reasons Field and Horwich have for agreeing with Dummett on this point seem different. Horwich agrees with Dummett that deflationary theories use the meanings of sentences to define truth and so cannot also use truth to explain meaning. Field, on the other hand, seems motivated by the worry that a truth-conditional theory of meaning will require us to say what makes it the case that sentences have truth-conditions and this will spoil a disquotational theory of possessing truth-conditions. Horwich defends a use theory of meaning in his 1998b.

claims that minimalism has as its axioms the infinity of instances of that schema. This theory can then be used in his explanation of the meaning of ‘true’. He claims that someone grasps the meaning of ‘true’ when they are disposed to accept all non-paradoxical instances of the equivalence schema without evidence.<sup>111</sup> Thus he does not offer us a definition of ‘true’ but instead spells out what it is for someone to possess the concept of truth. But he does make a fundamental claim about the property of truth: that there is no more to it than is spelt out by the instances of the equivalence schema.<sup>112</sup> For example, there is no more to the truth of the proposition that snow is white than that snow is white. This is a clear denial of a hidden essence view of truth such as Alston’s. Moreover, he insists that all the explanatory work done by appealing to the property of truth can be done using the instances of the equivalence schema. But he draws back from saying that truth is not a property at all; rather, it is ‘a complex or naturalistic property’ and so does not have a ‘constitutive structure’ or a ‘causal behaviour’ or ‘typical manifestations’.<sup>113</sup> He suggests that truth might be best characterized as a ‘logical property’.<sup>114</sup>

More radically, Horwich agrees with Field that a deflationist about truth must hold parallel views about reference and satisfaction. The reason for supposing there is such a commitment seems to be that which Field offered in 1972: namely, that a theory of reference can be used in combination with a Tarski-style truth definition to create a substantial or inflationary theory of truth. Both Field and Horwich also point out that they differ from Tarski in not building compositionality into their definition, focusing instead on the instances of the equivalence schema.<sup>115</sup> As Field says, this frees deflationism from worries about non-compositional natural language constructions by allowing the logic or syntax of expressions to dictate when the axioms about truth will entail compositional theorems. It is clear that the major contemporary forms of deflationism are intended as packages of views about semantics that attempt to deflate the truth-theoretic notions and provide an alternative, non-truth-conditional theory of meaning.

In every such package is the Quinean view that the utility of the truth-predicate lies in its role in allowing us to express certain generalizations. Field, in particular, claimed that the cognitive equivalence of ‘p’ and “‘p’ is true” is needed for ‘true’ to play this role so that even correspondence theorists need a disquotational truth-predicate. Anil Gupta, however, has put serious pressure on this idea, arguing that such a cognitive equivalence would be required only if the generalizations and the conjunction they replace are cognitively equivalent.<sup>116</sup> Yet it is clear that no conjunction, no matter how long and no matter if it exhausts all the instances being generalized over, is cognitively equivalent to a generalization, even if the conjunction, *per impossibile*, is infinitely long. So there is no need for a cognitive equivalence between ‘p’ and “‘p’ is true”. However, Gupta’s criticism cuts deeper than this. We have also seen that a standard deflationist move is to

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<sup>111</sup> Horwich 1998a: 35.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.* 36f and 135-9.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.* 37f.

<sup>114</sup> Horwich takes this term from Field’s description of the minimalist position on the nature of truth (Field 1992: 321).

<sup>115</sup> Field 1994: 124f; Horwich 1998a: 10.

<sup>116</sup> Gupta 1993: 287-90. The point is a reprise of Russell 1918: 207.

block assertions of the explanatory power of truth by claiming that when ‘true’ appears in explanations it does so merely as a device of generalization. Gupta argued that this move assumes that if we can explain all the instances of some generalization we have also explained the generalization. But this in turn relies on the already rejected intensional equivalence.<sup>117</sup> Gupta’s point is in fact an expression of the general worry that deflationists will not be able to explain basic generalizations about truth.<sup>118</sup> The problem is particularly worrying for Horwich, who insists that it is only the instances of the equivalence schema that are needed to perform all the explanatory work.<sup>119</sup>

Field offers an obvious and general solution to this worry, one that we have met before: the equivalence schema can be generalized via substitutional quantification and used as the basis for explanations.<sup>120</sup> However, Horwich maintains that the point of the truth-predicate is to enable us to do without substitutional quantification. In other words, if we had a device for substitutional quantification we would not need a truth-predicate at all. Further, Horwich rightly points out that substitutional quantification is usually explained using the notion of truth and so cannot be appealed to in defining it.<sup>121</sup> Although neither point is conclusive, they do suggest that coping with generalizations will not be a trivial matter for a deflationist. Indeed, as Horwich himself observes, there is a basic problem even in giving a general formulation of the deflationist position.

### 3.8 Primitivism and deflationism: Sosa

Contemporary deflationists usually distinguish themselves from their predecessors by emphasizing that truth is a property. As Ernest Sosa has pointed out, however, this change in the deflationist position brings it very close to primitivism. Field and Horwich both maintain that truth is a property without a constituent structure and which cannot be analysed by providing necessary and sufficient conditions for its instantiation. A Moorean primitivist adheres to the same claims. And although Moore and Russell did not make anything of the equivalence schema, or its instances, as in anyway definitional of truth, their version of primitivism looks compatible with its use:

On this view [Moorean primitivism], what you cannot do either with *good* or with *yellow* or with truth is to define it, to give an illuminating, compact, at least surveyable, Moorean analysis of it. It is in *this* sense that you cannot philosophically “explain” any such “simple” concept. And this leaves it open that you should have *a priori* knowledge of infinitely many propositions constituted essentially by such concepts.

(Sosa 1993: 11)

Field and Horwich provide explanations of what it is to grasp the concept of truth, rather than merely urging that it is too simple to be analysed, but this does not suffice to distinguish them from primitivists. To suggest what it is to grasp a concept is quite different from offering a definition of the concept. To suppose otherwise would be like

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<sup>117</sup> *ibid.* 290-5.

<sup>118</sup> This general point is made by Soames (1999: 247f) in criticism of Horwich.

<sup>119</sup> It is not at all worrying for prosententialists, as Gupta notes at fn. 7.

<sup>120</sup> Field 1994: 115. Chris Hill suggests the same move (Hill 2002).

<sup>121</sup> Horwich 1998a: 25f.

thinking one could not be a primitivist about yellow if one claimed that fully possessing the concept of yellow involves being disposed to deploy the concept in the presence of yellow things.

Nor can deflationists readily distinguish themselves from primitivists on the grounds that they point out the supervenience base for the property of truth. While we can agree that they do indicate, for each proposition or utterance, what would make it the case for this truth-bearer to be true, there is nothing in common from one truth-bearer to another summarizable in any sort of analysis or characterization of the property. Primitivists, while not so *committed*, could accept that the property has this massively disjunctive nature. But for some philosophers the possibility of such disjunction counts as a *reductio*.<sup>122</sup> The debate at this point is retracing Moore's waverings of 1899 (see §1.1 above).

As Sosa argued, to go beyond primitivism, deflationists must commit themselves to strong versions of their official claims. For example, if a deflationist said that there is and can be no theory of truth beyond the instances of the equivalence schema, they would be making a claim that is quite foreign to primitivism.<sup>123</sup> The primitivist can accept these biconditionals as *a priori* propositions essentially involving truth, but does not suppose that they are *the only* such propositions. Similarly, primitivists show no signs of agreeing to the standard deflationist claim that truth does not play any explanatory role. However, in these cases it may well seem that primitivism has the upper hand. It is difficult to see why deflationists think these strong conclusions should follow from their basic position, which seems to be just that of the primitivist. Sosa, accordingly, thinks we should adopt the more moderate option and endorse primitivism until the strong deflationary claims can be made out.<sup>124</sup>

These similarities between primitivism and deflationism disturb the generally accepted view that deflationism is incompatible with truth-conditional semantics. In essence, Davidson's position, which is at least *prima facie* consistent, is equivalent to the primitivism of the early Moore and Russell plus the added claim that truth is the central concept in the theory of meaning. Given that the rejection of truth-conditional semantics is meant to follow from basic deflationary claims about truth, however, and given how similar these seem to primitivism, we suggest that the arguments for this incompatibility need to be reconsidered.

### 3.9 Identity: Dodd, Hornsby, McDowell

It is ironic that the twentieth century (and ur-analytic philosophy itself) began with a commitment to a primitivist theory of truth that, as we pointed out in our earlier discussion, is all too easy to confuse with an identity theory. The irony lies in the century's ending with the re-emergence of both primitivism and identity theories which

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<sup>122</sup> Searle 1995: 215.

<sup>123</sup> Sosa 1993: 13f.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.* 14.

continue to be difficult to keep separate both from each other and from deflationary theories.

The identity theories we have in mind are those officially endorsed by Julian Dodd and Jennifer Hornsby, and strongly suggested by the work of John McDowell. All three are committed to the view that although truth is a property there can be no definition of truth.<sup>125</sup> They also all profess to be attempting to capture the truism that ‘When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case.’<sup>126</sup> Given this, it does indeed seem as if the identity theory just is primitivism. But the crucial interpretation put on the truism by identity theorists was, of course, that truth-bearers are identical with truthmakers. We have seen the strained metaphysical assumptions which made this interpretation possible for Bradley and his followers. Contemporary identity theorists aim to show us different ways in which the initially shocking identity-statement can be made anodyne.<sup>127</sup>

Dodd’s leading idea is that the mistake of correspondence theories is to suppose that there is something that makes truths true.<sup>128</sup> In other words, correspondentists go wrong in adopting the truthmaker principle. In particular, Dodd has no truck with the idea that the world contains states-of-affairs. To rectify the mistake, he suggests that we do not abandon the intuitive notion of facts, but rather identify facts with true propositions. To avoid letting states-of-affairs creep in through the back door, he maintains that propositions must be conceived as Fregean rather than Russellian. His strategy, then, is to render the identity theory plausible by following Strawson in suggesting that facts are not *in* the world. However, Strawson’s further point was that if this is right, then claims about truths corresponding to facts are trivial because there is no way to identify facts independently of identifying the propositions to which they correspond. The same point can be made, and has been, about Dodd’s identity theory.<sup>129</sup> In response Dodd has emphasized, as has Hornsby, that it is precisely the point of identity theories that we cannot identify facts independently of propositions.<sup>130</sup> Their positions are maintained in order to point up the failings of the correspondence theory and not to put forward positive claims about the nature of truth. These sound remarkably like the words of a deflationist. Indeed, Dodd claims that, by ruling out truthmakers, arguing for his type of identity theory is precisely the ground-clearing that must be done before one can adopt a deflationary theory – as he went on to do.<sup>131</sup> But his position also remains compatible with primitivism. It is thus difficult to see how his ‘modest identity theory’ is more than deflationism (specifically Horwichian minimalism) plus an added metaphysical claim that states-of-affairs do not exist.

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<sup>125</sup> Dodd 2000: 123; Hornsby 1997: 2f. McDowell’s notorious quietism suggests that he would agree to the indefinability thesis.

<sup>126</sup> McDowell 1994: 27 (his italics). The pull of this idea, and the sense that traditional theories sell us short, is, as we saw in §§1.2 and 3.3, evident in Frege, Bradley and Mackie. Clearly it is not a transitory feature of the notion of truth.

<sup>127</sup> Candlish 1999a explores a range of ways this might be done, some of which resemble the theories of Dodd, Hornsby and McDowell.

<sup>128</sup> Dodd 2000: ch. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Candlish 1999b: 235f.

<sup>130</sup> Dodd 2000: 125. Hornsby 1997: 3, fn. 5.

<sup>131</sup> Dodd 2000: chapter 6.

Rather than conceive of facts as proposition-like, an alternative way to make an identity theory plausible is to conceive of propositions as fact-like, as the early Russell and Moore did.<sup>132</sup> As Marian David points out in this context, the idea that some propositions are ‘Russellian’ is once again in favour in the wake of the work of Kripke, Putnam, Kaplan and others. Even so, this body of work provides support only for the claim that *some* propositions are Russellian, not all.<sup>133</sup> So, the identity theory of truth for propositions is difficult to defend whether we see propositions as fact-like or facts as proposition-like. And yet, as David also notices, the theory is even more implausible if we treat sentences or belief states as the bearers of truth.<sup>134</sup> Doing so would mean that reality is either linguistic or mental.

Perhaps what is needed to escape these worries is a more radical version of the identity theory like that defended by Hornsby, who takes her lead from some of McDowell’s comments in *Mind and World*. Their strategy, in attempting to make the purported identity palatable, is to first introduce the term ‘thinkable’ as a way of referring to the contents of our propositional attitudes. Like Dodd, though, they agree that thinkables belong in the ‘realm of Fregean sense’.<sup>135</sup> By conceiving of content as that-which-can-be-thought, they make the beginnings of an approach to loosening our grip on the idea that content is radically different from parts of reality. To advance the strategy they ask us to conceive reality as also within the realm of Fregean sense (or within the space of reasons or, again, within the sphere of the conceptual). Like the neopragmatists, they ask us to give up the idea of a reality outside a conceptual scheme. Moreover they do so in order that we can see ourselves as in direct touch with reality without any representational intermediaries.<sup>136</sup> This, they hope, allows us to suppose that there is ‘no ontological gap’ between thought and the world.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, when we think truly we think what is the case because reality itself is thinkable. But why should we suppose this is so? Why agree with the sort of absolute idealism that posits the rationality of reality? Could there not be parts of reality that are unthinkable, that will forever resist our attempts to conceptualize them? There is nothing stopping an identity theorist of this stripe from admitting that not all reality can be conceptualized provided they limit themselves to the claim that *when* a thinkable is true it is identical with an aspect of the world. But McDowell’s talk of reality being entirely within the conceptual seems to rule such modesty out. And although Hornsby offers a response to this sort of worry it is difficult to make out what it amounts to.<sup>138</sup> Further, as Dodd points out, the metaphor of the world being within the realm of sense suggests that the world is

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<sup>132</sup> As Candlish (1999a) points out, identity theories can result both from nudging facts towards propositions and from nudging propositions towards facts. See also Engel 2002: 37-40.

<sup>133</sup> David 2001: 692-695.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid: 691f.

<sup>135</sup> Hornsby makes her commitment to this thesis clear in her 1999.

<sup>136</sup> We do not mean to suggest that Hornsby and Dodd are in complete agreement with the neopragmatists on these matters. It is part of McDowell’s position, for example, that while Davidson and Rorty share his goals here, they fail, each in their own way, to carry their projects to completion.

<sup>137</sup> McDowell 1994: 27. Hornsby quotes McDowell approvingly at 1997: 1.

<sup>138</sup> Hornsby 1997: §§2.3 and 2.4.

made up of concepts rather than objects.<sup>139</sup> At the least, the metaphor needs to be explained. Although it is unclear whether this can be done successfully, we think it would be wrong to agree with Dodd that this type of identity theory is obviously internally incoherent. Dodd bases his claim on the assumption that Hornsby and McDowell want facts to be both states-of-affairs and propositions. However, neither part of this assumption is strictly correct. Hornsby has explicitly asserted that facts are within the realm of sense, states-of-affairs are not.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, ‘the realm of Fregean sense’ clearly means something quite particular to McDowell. More specifically, it is not meant to be the same ‘ontological category’ as is opposed to the ontological category of ‘the realm of reference’ in the traditional dichotomy. Again, though, it is unclear what such a position amounts to and whether it can be defended. The challenge for the identity theorist is the same as that for the minimal correspondentist: to distinguish their view from deflationism without thereby condemning it to obscurity.

#### 4. Brief Conclusion

Our historical overview of twentieth century analytic philosophy’s thought about truth shows both how diverse this thought has been and yet how often older theories have been abandoned and forgotten, only to be taken up again. For, on the one hand, theories that share the same name have often proved to be vastly different. Yet, on the other, many of the positions adopted at the close of the century, in an attempt to discover new directions for the philosophy of truth, turned out to be remarkably similar to the theories offered at the beginning of the century which had been largely ignored in the quest for novelty.

Despite the range of different theories of truth that have been, and are still being, endorsed, there appears to be a growing consensus about a number of important claims about truth. The majority of contemporary theorists we have mentioned agree, for example, that there is less to say about truth, and that theories of truth are less central to philosophy, than was once thought. Even those, like Davidson, who see truth as an essential concept for the possibility of thought, do not suppose that the attempt to analyse this concept is a worthwhile philosophical project. While the resulting consensus might be called a deflationary attitude to truth, it should be carefully distinguished from a commitment to what are usually called deflationary theories of truth. The latter are specific theories that embody a number of controversial commitments about truth and related topics, whereas the former is a general feeling that the best we will do when it comes to truth is to spell out a number of truisms and avoid the many mistakes that our brief history has shown it is all too easy to make.

Perhaps part of the explanation for the apparent consensus is that there is a more fundamental, and genuine, consensus that many of the historical debates about truth have been the result either of philosophers focusing their attention unawares on different questions or of disagreements about adjacent philosophical topics for which truth has served as a proxy. We have seen many instances of both types of disagreement. The key

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<sup>139</sup> Dodd 1995: 163. McDowell attempted to head off this sort of criticism at his 1994: 179f.

<sup>140</sup> Hornsby 1999: 241f.

issues about truth have been thought, at some periods, to be the use and function of ‘true’, at others to be the term’s definition, at still others to be the criteria for attributing truth to truth-bearers, and at others again to be the task of discovering the nature of the property of truth. Equally fundamental disagreements have arisen because of differences about which truth-bearer is primary and so whether the question of truth for beliefs, propositions, utterances or sentences is the more important. The confusion has only been compounded by the spilling over, into the theory of truth, of disputes in related areas, such as the theory of meaning, the nature of causal explanations, and the nature of quantification. Often, in fact, the two sources of disagreement we have mentioned came together when divergences about the way to construct theories of meaning, say, resulted in disputes about whether such theories belong to the theory of truth.

As well as being often confused, the extended debate about truth in the previous century also suffered from paying insufficient attention to the nature of truth’s apparent opposite, falsity. Although often paid lip service, this question has rarely been adequately addressed. Yet understanding the relation between falsity, rejection, negation and denial is surely as crucial to understanding our linguistic practice as is understanding the relation between truth, acceptance and assertion. Further, as many philosophers have suggested,<sup>141</sup> theories of truth should allow us to deal with the purported examples of truth-value gaps and gluts. However, understanding falsity is essential to answering questions about the possibility of such phenomena.<sup>142</sup> These cases, and in particular the Sorites paradoxes, also suggest that we pay attention to the equally stubborn but neglected question of the possibility of degrees of truth. For one tempting reaction to the Sorites is to postulate continuum-many truth-values between 0 and 1.<sup>143</sup>

Apart from these neglected questions, the outstanding issue for the theory of truth is whether it is right to adopt the deflationary attitude. It seems evident that the popularity of this attitude is the result of a failure to reach agreement even on what an investigation of truth ought to be: there is no consensus on how to answer the question, What issues properly belong to the theory of truth?, let alone on whether answering it will involve discovery rather than decision. This does not imply that the deflationary attitude is mistaken: it may be that the reason philosophers have not found a worthwhile project to agree on is that the nature of truth entails that there is no such thing. An alternative explanation is that we have simply lost our way. It remains to be seen which explanation is true.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> For example, Kripke and Soames (see §3.7 above).

<sup>142</sup> A rare, but penetrating, discussion of these issues is the debate between Smiley and Priest (1993).

<sup>143</sup> For a deft description of the reaction and its motivation, some bibliography, and a brief exploration of its ramifications for, e.g., modus ponens, and assigning truth values to molecular propositions, see chapter 2 of Sainsbury 1995.

<sup>144</sup> We wish to record our thanks to Hugh Mellor for his valuable comments on an earlier draft.