

MINIMALISM ABOUT TRUTH

A. Gupta: *A Critique of Deflationism*

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1 Outline

Project of deflationism consists in (a) description & function of 'true', and (b) derivation of deflationary consequences from (a).

Gupta provides two readings of (a):

weak: plausible, but does not yield (b)

strong: yields (b), but is not plausible

General idea of deflationism: The function of truth lies in its expressive power, e.g. it allows introducing 'true' as a predicate (from (2) to (3)), and therefore quantification over sentences/propositions (from (3) to (4)):

(2) [Sky is blue & snow is white] & [Chicago is blue & snow is white] &

(3) ['Sky is blue' is true & snow is white] & ['Chicago is blue' is true & snow is white] &

(4) For all sentences x: [x is true & snow is white].

Four theses about the *Disquotational Theory of Truth* (p. 61):

DISQUOTATION THESIS: The truth predicate is a *device of disquotation*.

weak reading: T-biconditionals necessarily true

strong reading: T-biconditionals explain the meaning of 'true'

Note: strong reading is the goal of the deflationist!

INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS: The truth predicate enables us to *express* certain infinite conjunctions and disjunctions; (4), for instance, expresses (2) and (3).

weak reading: Infinite conjunctions materially/necessarily equivalent to universals

strong reading: Infinite conjunctions have the same 'sense' as universals

THE GENERALIZATION THESIS: The truth predicate provides a means for generalizing over sentence positions even when the variables are pronominal

THE CONNECTION THESIS: The truth predicate serves its expressive functions in virtue of its disquotation feature.

2 The Connection Thesis

General idea: From the function of 'true' to disquotation.

"The function of (4) is to express (2). But this is possible only if (2) and (3) are equivalent. [...] [DISQUOTATION] is needed to ensure that the equivalence of (2) and (3) holds. Hence, disquotation is needed to ensure that truth plays its desired role in generalizations such as (4) [THE CONNECTION THESIS]. The role of the Infinite Conjunction Thesis in the argument is to show that (2) and (3) need to be equivalent, if the truth predicate is to play its expressive role." (p. 62)

Two readings of INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS:

- Weak: Requires material/necessary equivalence. But then it also only requires disquotation to provide necessarily true T-biconditionals, and not its strong version.
- Strong: The strong reading is *false*. Affirming a generalization and affirming all of its instances are different things.

3 The causal-explanatory role of Truth

(5) The laws of a mature science are typically approximately true.

(6) True beliefs about how to attain our goals tend to facilitate success in achieving them.

(7) Beliefs formed as a result of our methods of inquiry tend to be true.

Putnam: Truth plays a causal-explanatory rule in "explaining the success of mature sciences,[...] and *our* success in attaining our goals" (p. 65)

Horwich: Minimalism gives explanation (see chapter 3)

Gupta: two challenges for Horwich remain.

- Horwich does not provide reasons why there might not be a substantial theory. This is resolved by the strong reading of the DISQUOTATION THESIS.
- Horwich only explains instances of (6), not (6) itself. This is resolved by the strong INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS. The infinite conjunction of the instances of (6) is explained by T-biconditionals. Since by the INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS (6) expresses the infinite conjunction the T-biconditionals explain (6).

Note: This only works with the strong reading. The weak reading does not suffice, since different necessary sentences might have different explanations, e.g. "Cicery is Tully" and "Water is H_2O "

But the strong INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS is false (regarding explanations). An explanation for each instance might differ from the explanation for the generalization: The death of every single person on a boat might be explained by individual reasons (e.g. heart attacks), but the explanation for "Everyone on the boat died" might be due to it being capsized. (p. 67).

Conclusion: The Strong INFINITE CONJUNCTION THESIS is plainly false.

4 Meaning and Truth

4.1 Understanding 'true'

According to **truth-conditional semantics** the meaning of a sentence is determined by its truth-conditions. The strong DISQUOTATION THESIS refutes this idea: If the meaning of 'true' is explained by T-biconditionals we need prior understanding of meaning of the sentences/propositions. Thus, the meaning of a sentence cannot be its truth-conditions.

Note: Truth-conditional semantics require a weak reading of DISQUOTATION. (p. 69)

How do we acquire a understanding of 'true'? According to the **deflationist** "we first learn some firstorder words ('snow,' 'white,' etc.) and then we arrive at 'true' definitionally through the T-biconditionals" (p.69).

Problem: For a full understanding of 'true' one would need to know all T-biconditionals, and to know all T-biconditionals one would need to know all concepts occuring in the sentences. The deflationist needs **massive conceptual ressources**.

4.2 Denying DISQUOTATION

It seems that the DISQUOTATION THESIS is wrong. But "what are we denying in denying [it]?" (p. 70)
Denying it means:

- (i) T-biconditionals do not provide a **foundation** for deflationism, but they still might be necessarily true.
- (ii) T-biconditionals do not define the **meaning** of 'true', although they might fix the extension and intension.

Definition: x iff $\varphi(x)$

Ideology of a definition: totality of concepts that appear in φ

Ideology of a term: concepts necessary and sufficient to understand the term

Adequacy condition: Ideology of definition coincides with ideology of the term

Argument: Understanding the definition of 'true' involves vast ideology. Thus, understanding the term requires understanding the same vast ideology. But one can understand the meaning of 'true' without knowing the concept of 'relativistic mass'. Thus, T-biconditionals do not fix the meaning of 'true'. Understanding T-biconditionals, and understanding 'true' involve different concepts.

- (iii) Asserting "'p' is true" means asserting "p". But the synonymy is not due to the meaning of 'true'. But the synonymy is a pragmatic fact that can be explained by **common knowledge**.
- (iv) "T-biconditionals [might be] 'true solely in virtue of meaning.'" But this is not to say that the T-biconditionals are "true solely in virtue of the meaning of 'true'".(p. 71)

5 The *Form* (T)

Instead of the T-biconditionals one alternative explanation for truth might lie in their form (T)

(T) '____' is true iff ____

5.1 The Generalization Approach

(GT) All instances of the form (T) are true.

(GT) does not involve a vast ideology. But it is circular (since it involves the term 'true'), and no T-biconditional is derivable. It will always yield a sentence of the form "'T-biconditional' is true".

5.2 The Syntactic Approach

The syntactic approach makes use of the rule (ST)

(ST) ' _____ ' is true,

in order to add or eliminate " ' _____ ' is true ". (ST) does not involve a vast ideology, and it is not circular. But it does not explain the meaning of 'true'. Furthermore, some inferences in intensional contexts cannot be explained since it does not allow the use of 'is true' as a predicate.

5.3 The Inferential Approach

The meaning of 'true' lies in the **inferences** the form (T) allows. But what is the correct notion of 'inference', if truth cannot appear in its definition? Whether this can be done (e.g. via conceptual practices like assertion, commitment,...) is left open. Gupta adds two remarks:

- The burden of explaining truth in inferential terms seems to be higher than using truth to explain conceptual practices in non-referential terms.
- Describing basic facts about conceptual practice might involve 'true'. Explaining logical inference will most likely involve truth: If A can be inferred from B, then A is true if B is true.

6 Summary

"The usefulness of truth lies in the **expressive power** that it provides. The truth predicate, by providing us with an indirect means of quantifying over sentence positions, enables us to **express** certain infinite conjunctions and disjunctions. To perform this function truth must be a **device of disquotation**: Applied to a quoted sentence it must undo the effect of the quotation marks. This function therefore requires the T-biconditionals to be **definitional** of 'true. '"(p. 76)

	express	device of disquotation	definitional
extensional	material equivalence	T-bicond. true	extension fixing
intensional	necessary equivalence	T-bicond. necessarily true	intension fixing
strong	abbreviation, i.e. same meaning	synonymy of ' '_____' is true' and '_____'	explain meaning

- The extensional and intensional readings are "good, true, and insightful". But the desired deflationist consequences do not follow.
- The strong reading yields the desired consequences, but is not plausible.

express: infinite conjunction and generalization do not involve the same conceptual resources

device of disquotation: different concepts needed to understand each side

definitional: massive ideology

6.1 Usefulness of Truth

Gupta sees the usefulness of 'true' in two points: (p. 77)

- understanding 'true' requires limited range of conceptual resources
- 'true' enables us to talk and think about things that lie far beyond this range.

E.g. by stating 'All men are mortal' one does *not* need to say of each man that he is mortal. So its usefulness lies in the very fact that infinite conjunctions and their generalizations are not synonymous.