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THE MANY (YET FEW) FACES OF DEFLATIONISM

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It's often said that according to deflationary theories of truth, truth is not a 'substantial' property. While this is a fine slogan, it is far from transparent what deflationists mean (or ought to mean) in saying that truth is 'insubstantial'. Focusing so intently upon the concept of truth and the word 'true', I argue, deflationists and their critics have been insufficiently attentive to a host of metaphysical complexities that arise for deflationists in connection with the property of truth. My aim is to correct several misunderstandings as to what deflationists are after here—including some harboured by deflationists themselves—and to offer an account of the commitments about truth's nature that they ought to undertake. In developing this account, I focus particularly upon the issue of what metaphysics of truth a Horwichian minimalist ought to adopt.

Keywords: Truth, deflationism, minimalism, substantial properties, constitution, logical properties.

I. DEFLATIONISM AND TRUTH'S NATURE

Deflationary truth theories have revolutionized the study of truth. Their major effect has been to shift attention from metaphysical questions about truth, especially concerning the essence of the property *truth*, to questions concerning the meaning and function of the concept TRUTH and the word 'true'. In their devotion to such conceptual and linguistic concerns, certain leading deflationists have overlooked glaring and challenging metaphysical complexities inherent in their own views—or so I shall argue. Specifically, these deflationists have paid insufficient attention to a cluster of questions about *truth*'s nature that any theorist of *truth* must address. Lacking satisfactory responses to these questions, it will be impossible to offer a thoroughgoing assessment of the merits of deflationism, and given the deflationary trend in contemporary truth theory, this will mean stalled progress in the study of truth. My aim in this paper, then, is to carefully lay out each of these questions about *truth*'s nature and then offer an assessment of them vis-à-vis deflationism. While I won't defend responses

to all of the questions, I hope to convey their underappreciated subtlety and to thereby aid in the ongoing effort to come to grips with deflationism.

Wright (1998: 38–9) aptly points out that deflationism, as it is typically advanced, is better described as a 'tendency' than as a particular position on truth. One does often hear a certain slogan associated with deflationary theories of truth: that truth is not substantial/substantive/thick/weighty/chunky. As with slogans generally, this claim is highly suggestive; the trouble is that it's unclear what it means. For one thing, it's at least four ways ambiguous: it might be a contention about theories of truth, the ordinary concept TRUTH, the word 'true' or the property *truth*. To keep things manageable and because it has been particularly neglected, we'll concentrate in what follows on the property-level reading.²

Of course, so focusing our efforts affords only a bit of clarity, since it's highly non-obvious what it would mean for *truth* to be an insubstantial property. Certain well-known deflationists—notably Ayer (1946), Brandom (2005), Grover (1992), Ramsey (1927) and Strawson (1949, 1950)—strongly suspected that there is no such property as *truth*; it's very likely, they argued, that *truth* simply doesn't exist. If this were the unanimous deflationary position, then it would be better for deflationists to simply say that *truth* probably doesn't exist, saving a detour through the talk of 'substantiality'.³

The interesting wrinkle is that a number of contemporary deflationists, most notably Paul Horwich, grant that *truth* is a real, *bona fide* property. Horwich (1998b: 38) regards '(is) true' as a predicate and feels compelled on that account to take 'is true' to 'stand for' *truth*, a rationale with which the deflationists Dodd (2008: §3.1, 136–7), Künne (2003: 90) and Williams (2002: §4) have expressed sympathy. But, say these theorists, *truth* is no ordinary property. Unlike perhaps *being a tree* or *being made of tin, truth* is 'insubstantial'. Call someone who posits a property *truth* but holds that it is 'insubstantial' a *moderate deflationist*. A burden

¹ A small sampling of the many discussions employing this terminology includes Bar-On, Horisk & Lycan (2000: 7), Edwards (2013), Grover (1992: 23), Horwich (2005: 70; 2010: 14; 2013: 57), Price (1998: 241), Williams (2002: §4) and Wright (1998: 34).

² In what follows, I'll continue to use small caps to refer to concepts, single quotes to refer to linguistic expressions and italics to refer to properties (and for emphasis).

³ A general question lurks in the background here, namely 'What are properties?' Deflationists (and truth theorists more generally) have said surprisingly little about this issue and it certainly deserves more of their attention. Yet as will become clear, we can productively inquire about *truth*'s substantiality without committing to a particular conception of properties.

⁴ Asay (2013: 104, 106) also appears to be sympathetic towards this rationale. McGinn (2000: ch. 5) takes *truth* to be a property, though McGinn denies (contentiously) that he is a deflationist. Likewise, I suspect that Christopher Hill is willing to posit *truth*, given that TRUTH is a 'monadic predicative concept' (Hill 2002: 23), though the evidence is too thin to be certain. Since among these theorists, Horwich's views are the most thoroughly developed, I'll often use Horwich as a test case in what follows.

From now on, I'll omit parenthetical reference to 'is' when speaking about the expression '(is) true'.

on the moderate deflationist is to then explain in virtue of what *truth* is an 'insubstantial' property. It turns out that moderate deflationists and their critics have been extremely equivocal on this point. There are five senses in which moderate deflationists have held, or have been taken to hold, that *truth* is insubstantial. These theses tend to be run together or erroneously assumed (I shall argue) to logically depend upon one another. To properly evaluate the prospects of moderate deflationism, it's vital that we pry them apart.

My contention will be that two of these theses should each be regarded as partially definitive of moderate deflationism and that neither thesis entails the other. In this way, moderate deflationism has two separable faces (I'll expand on this in Section IV). I remain neutral here as to which aspects of moderate deflationism, if any, we ought to endorse; as Russell (1912/1980: ch. 15) intimates, determining which questions we should ask is often just as arduous and valuable as detailing answers to them. After arguing for these conclusions, I'll take up a pair of objections to this analysis based on recent work by Edwards (2013).

II. THREE CONSTRAINTS

The theses about *truth* that have been associated with moderate deflationism are that *truth* (i) is a 'metaphysically transparent' property, (ii) is a 'non-explanatory' property, (iii) lacks a constitution theory, (iv) is a rather abundant property and (v) is a 'logical' property. I'll assume in what follows that for a thesis to be characteristic of moderate deflationism, it is necessary and sufficient that it have the following three features:⁵

- (a) it is a suitably deflationary claim about truth (the Deflationary Constraint);
- (b) it is directly about the features of *truth*—not directly about only the features of TRUTH or 'true' (the *Metaphysical Constraint*); and
- (c) it is not a mere special case of a thesis with features (a) and (b) (the *Special Case Constraint*).

Let me say a few words about the motivations for these constraints and the demands that they impose. I take two conditions to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a claim about *truth* to satisfy the Deflationary Constraint. The first is that the claim should jeopardize traditional metaphysical inquiry into *truth*'s essence to some degree. The basic thought is that deflationary claims about *truth* are meant to *deflate* something—namely the sort of metaphysical inquiry about *truth* pursued by card-carrying correspondence, epistemic and pragmatic theorists of truth such as (to name

 $^{^5}$ Cp. the methodology that Horwich (2010: ch. 2, n. 3) proposes for characterizing deflationism about truth.

only a few) Thomas Aquinas, Brand Blanshard and William James. I'll say more about the distinctive character of such inquiry in Sections III.2 and III.3.

The second condition for a claim to satisfy the Deflationary Constraint is that at least one paradigmatic moderate deflationist is committed by their views on truth to endorsing it and no paradigmatic moderate deflationist is committed by their views on truth to rejecting it (as intimated above, I take the views of Asay, Dodd, Horwich, Künne and Williams to be paradigmatic here). This condition ensures that the claim does indeed have a foothold in extant varieties of moderate deflationism and is available to an advocate of any such view.

A pleasing consequence of this constraint is that, for instance, the claim that there are no properties isn't characteristic of moderate deflationism. While it would deflate traditional inquiry into *truth*'s nature, we rightly predict that this claim isn't *suitably* deflationary, since every moderate deflationist takes there to be at least one property—namely *truth*.

The impetus behind the Metaphysical Constraint is that we're interested here to determine which significant features the moderate deflationist attributes to *truth*. Significant features of predicates and predicative concepts don't in general transmit to the properties that they denote. Predicative concepts, e.g. solid, are presumably mental entities, yet some such concepts denote non-mental properties, e.g. *being solid*. Likewise, *being disgusting* is denoted by the French predicate '(est) dégoûtant', though *being disgusting* is not a French (?) property. Accordingly, when seeking to determine which claims are characteristic of a moderate deflationary account of *truth*, we'll concentrate on claims of the form '*truth* has (lacks) feature F', rather than claims of the form '*truth* is denoted by an F (non-F) predicate/concept'.

Together, the Deflationary and Metaphysical Constraints ensure that the commitments we associate with moderate deflationism are both suitably deflationary and distinctively metaphysical. Lastly, the Special Case Constraint enables us to centre upon the *fundamental* commitments of moderate deflationism, those that constitute the core of the view, rather than those that merely follow from the view's core claims. What will emerge in the discussion to follow is that only theses (ii) and (iii) above (when suitably refined) satisfy all of these constraints. As a result, only (ii) and (iii) (once refined) are characteristic of a moderate deflationary metaphysics of *truth*—(i), (iv), (v) are in the present context red herrings. We turn now to examine each of these theses.

⁶ Note that we then allow for the possibility that a certain claim is characteristic of moderate deflationism as such though only some moderate deflationists explicitly endorse it; we'll address this matter in Section IV.

III. VARIETIES OF INSUBSTANTIALITY

III.1 Transparency

When developing his critique of deflationism, Lynch (2009: 107) attributes to moderate deflationists the view that *truth* is a *metaphysically transparent* property in the sense that 'we know all the essential facts about [*truth*]... just by grasping the concept of truth'. The truth concept at issue is the actual, ordinary concept TRUTH. And accordingly, the thesis that *truth* is metaphysically transparent is meant to have a significant methodological upshot—namely that to gain a comprehensive picture of *truth*'s essence, we need to only discern the content of our ordinary concept TRUTH. The thesis at issue here then amounts to

(Transparent_L) Any actual cognizer who possesses TRUTH *ipso facto* knows every essential fact about *truth*.

Nic Damnjanovic also takes moderate deflationists (he calls them 'new wave deflationists') to hold that *truth* is metaphysically transparent. Yet interestingly, Damnjanovic takes the operative notion of transparency to be different from that in (Transparent_L). In Damnjanovic's terminology, property P is metaphysically transparent, relative to a particular concept C of P iff C is *revelatory* of P's nature. For C to be revelatory in this way is for it to be the case that (Damnjanovic 2010: 48) 'any subject S who grasps [C] is in a position to know the full nature of [P] without further empirical investigation or a priori argumentation'. Focusing on the actual, ordinary concept TRUTH, *truth*'s being metaphysically transparent in this sense would then involve the following:⁷

(Transparent_D) Any actual cognizer who possesses TRUTH is *ipso facto* in a position to know, without further empirical inquiry or a priori argumentation, every essential fact about *truth*.

(Transparent_D) is stronger than (Transparent_D). When articulating (Transparent_D), Damnjanovic adopts a Williamsonian conception of being in a position to know, according to which to be in a position to know the proposition p (Williamson 2000: 95), 'no obstacle must block one's path to knowing p. If one is in a position to know p, and one has done what one is in a position to do to decide whether p is true, then one does know p'. Thus, if S knows p, then S is in a position to know p without further empirical inquiry or a priori argumentation, though not necessarily vice versa. For S might be in a position to satisfy the conditions for knowing p without relying on further empirical inquiry or a priori argumentation though S has yet to satisfy those conditions.

⁷ Wright (2001: 753) advances a similar conception of what *truth*'s metaphysical transparency would involve. Alston (2002), I take it, would deny that *truth* is metaphysically transparent in either sense.

Lynch takes the moderate deflationist to be committed to (Transparent_L), while Damnjanovic takes them to be committed only to (Transparent_D). To which are they committed, then? Actually, to neither. Consider, for instance, what a paradigm moderate deflationist—the *minimalist*, as depicted by Horwich—will say about *truth*'s metaphysical transparency.

Let the equivalence schema be

(ES) The proposition that p is true iff p.

According to the minimalist [Horwich 1998a: 103–4; 1998b: 121, 126, 128–9], one's possession of the actual, ordinary concept TRUTH consists, in essence, in one's disposition to accept every instance of (ES) in the absence of supporting argumentation. Minimalists likewise maintain (Horwich 1998b: 136) that the fundamental, essential facts about *truth* are those that are reported by the (non-paradoxical) instances of (ES).

Given this, it might seem that the minimalist should hold that truth is metaphysically transparent, in the sense of (Transparent_D). They claim that if S possesses truth, then S is disposed to accept every instance of (ES) in the absence of supporting argumentation. And if the essential facts about truth are exhausted by the (non-paradoxical) instances of (ES), then S would presumably be in a position to know every such fact without relying upon further empirical inquiry or a priori argumentation. To come to know these facts, all that S would need to do is to reflectively tease out the content of her concept of truth. Or so the argument might go.

A flaw in this reasoning is brought out by an influential observation due to Gupta (1993: 365, 366). Referring to Horwich's *minimal theory of truth*, whose axioms consist of the (non-paradoxical) instances of (ES), as 'MT', Gupta notices: ¹⁰

MT contains a biconditional for each proposition; none is excluded. The ideology of MT contains, therefore, each and every concept. It subsumes the ideology of every theory... None of us has more than a minute fraction of the concepts employed in the biconditionals.

MT contains infinitely many axioms, one for each proposition. Many of these axioms contain concepts that are possessed by very few (if any) possessors

 $^{^8}$ Horwich later revises this account in three respects. The revised proposal is that (Horwich 2010: 42, 47–8; ch. 3, n. 10) S possesses truth iff S is disposed—when supposing either that some entities are true or that some schema of the form 'the proposition that p is F iff p' is valid—to accept in the absence of supporting argumentation (i) every instance of (ES) that S understands and (ii) that only propositions are true. In what follows, we can safely set these further complexities aside.

⁹ Horwich later (Horwich 1998b: 43) adds a further axiom, that propositions are the sole bearers of truth. Again, we can safely set this aside in what follows.

¹⁰ Note that I mention Gupta's observation not to press his concerns against minimalism, but because it reveals an important aspect of the minimalist's position on *truth*'s metaphysical transparency. Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I frame this discussion in terms of Gupta's observation.

of TRUTH—e.g. the axiom that the proposition that the Continuum Hypothesis is independent of ZFC (Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory with the axiom of choice) is true iff the Continuum Hypothesis is independent of ZFC. Given that each such axiom reports a fundamental, essential fact about *truth*, there will then be (infinitely) many essential facts about *truth* that, according to the minimalist, few (if any) possessors of TRUTH are in a position to know without further empirical inquiry or a priori argumentation.

Hence, for the minimalist, truth fails to be metaphysically transparent even in the weak sense specified in (Transparent_D) and thus also in the stronger sense specified in (Transparent_L). Accordingly, both (Transparent_D) and (Transparent_L) fail to satisfy the Deflationary Constraint—at least one paradigmatic moderate deflationary view of truth entails that they are false.

Lynch and Damnjanovic, then, misdiagnose what moderate deflationists—specifically, minimalists—are after. Nevertheless, I think that they are onto something important. Horwich (1998b: 2, 49) famously contends that *truth* lacks a 'hidden structure'. I think that it's exactly right to explicate this idea by adverting to a notion of transparency. But rather than claiming that *truth* is metaphysically transparent, what the moderate deflationist should claim is that *truth* is susceptible at most to a transparent *constitution theory*, as I explain in the next section.

III.2 Lack of constitution

Whenever he explicitly specifies the sense in which he takes *truth* to be insubstantial, Horwich proposes that substantial properties are properties (Horwich 1998b: 143) 'for which there might well be a constitution theory'. So Horwich takes the following thesis to be central to his deflationism:¹¹

(Unconstituted*) There is a property *truth*, but it is insusceptible to a constitution theory (i.e. *truth* exists, but there is no possible, true constitution theory for *truth*).

Let a constitution theory for *truth* be a set of propositions of the following form (where 'P' is a schematic letter):¹²

(CT) For all x: x's instantiating truth consists in x's instantiating P.

Dodd (2008: 133-4) nicely explains the intention behind (Unconstituted*):

[According to the deflationist,] there can be no account of what truth *consists in*: there is no prospect of discovering a property F shared by all and only the truths,

¹² A constitution theory for *truth* is then a *theory* in the sense that the minimal theory of truth is meant to be a theory—i.e. it is a set of propositions—though see footnote 13.

 $^{^{11}}$ For discussion of this thesis, see David (1994: 65–6), Dodd (2008: 133–4) and Horwich (2010: ch. 1, 13, 15–16, 38; 2013: 57, 59). For related discussion, see Devitt (1991: 31–2), Horwich (1998a: 10, 29, 42, 104, 107, 113, 123; 2005: 75) and Wright (1998: 34–9, n. 9).

such that the truths are true because they are F...[T]he deflationist's contention is stronger than a mere rejection of correspondence: it is that the *kind of project* undertaken by a correspondence theorist—the search for a property F explanatory of truth—is misconceived.

The deflationary intention here is to directly undermine the traditional metaphysical project in truth theory—we might call it the *essence project*—a signature aim of which is to construct an accurate constitution theory for *truth* that reveals *truth*'s complex essence. Since establishing it would deal a severe blow to that enterprise, (Unconstituted*) does satisfy one aspect of the Deflationary Constraint. The trouble, as with (Transparent $_{L/D}$), is that at least one paradigm moderate deflationist—namely the minimalist—should actually reject (Unconstituted*).

Just as the axioms of the minimal theory of truth are meant to consist of the (non-paradoxical) instances of (ES), we might say that the axioms of the minimal constitution theory of truth (CT_M) consist of the (non-paradoxical) instances of

(MCT) For all *x*: *x*'s instantiating *truth* consists in *x*'s instantiating the property that the proposition that p instantiates iff p.

The key detail here is that given their adherence to the minimal theory of truth, the minimalist should likewise maintain that all of the axioms of (CT_M) are true. For this reason, they should in fact hold that *truth* is susceptible to a kind of constitution theory.¹³

Although (Unconstituted*) fails for this reason to satisfy the Deflationary Constraint, I think that Horwich and Dodd, too, are onto something

¹³ Strictly, Horwich (1998a: 10, 29; 1998b: 121, 143; 2010: ch. 1, §2, 38; 2013: 59) takes a constitution theory for *truth* to be *a* proposition of the form (CT) (though as intimated in footnote 12, it's questionable whether we should call a single proposition, as opposed to its singleton, a *theory*). Given this conception of constitution theories for *truth*, the important result here is that the minimalist should take *truth* to be susceptible to *infinitely many* constitution theories of the form (MCT). As the reader can verify, the set of these propositions is transparent, according to the minimalist, in a sense analogous to that sketched below—namely one who possesses TRUTH is *ipso facto* in a position to know solely on the basis of conceptual argumentation that its members are true. So the discussion to follow can easily be rephrased accordingly.

Also, this isn't to contend that the minimalist must hold that the class of (MCT)'s instances explains the class of (ES)'s instances, which would be contrary to Horwich (1998b: § § 2, 8, 14, 39; 2010: ch. 3, n. 5)'s views regarding the latter. Indeed, the former looks to be more complex than the latter, which suggests that if either class explains the other, then the latter explains the former.

It might be worried that on the present construal, the minimalist is committed to *infinitely many* properties that satisfy (MCT), each being associated with a particular proposition. This would be a questionable commitment [though see Jarvis (2012: esp. §5) for a defence of a similar view]. Luckily, the minimalist avoids it. Their commitment, rather, is to a property P such that the proposition that tables are solid is P iff tables are solid; the proposition that space—time is continuous is P iff space—time is continuous, and so on, for all (non-paradoxical) propositions. For the minimalist (and for many other truth theorists), this property is just *truth*. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

important. To see what it is, we should ask what significant differences there are between (CT_M) and, say, a familiar correspondence-theoretic constitution theory for $\textit{truth}\ (CT_{Corr})$ whose sole axiom is the proposition that 14

(CCT) For all *x*: *x*'s instantiating *truth* consists in *x*'s being isomorphic to a *worldly fact*, which is composed of objects, properties and relations.

What the minimalist needs to capture, I think, is the 'obviousness' of (CT_M) in comparison to (CT_{Corr}) . In doing so, they will align themselves as they intend—namely against the traditional project of constructing constitution theories for *truth* that 'reveal/uncover' *truth*'s essence. But in what sense is (CT_M) more obvious than (CT_{Corr}) ? Here's a suggestion: in judging that (CT_M) is more obvious, the minimalist relies tacitly upon a notion of transparency. The basic thought is that anyone who possesses the concept truth can, by drawing only on that concept's content, come to know that the axioms of (CT_M) are true.

We're to imagine a cognizer S who possesses truth competently reflecting upon truth, wherein she asks herself, 'What, precisely, is truth's nature?' Given the possession-conditions that the minimalist assigns to truth, their prediction is that S will adduce (perhaps inter alia) considerations along the lines of, 'Well, the proposition that tables are solid is true iff tables are solid and the proposition that space—time is continuous is true iff space—time is continuous and...', for every proposition that S considers. In so reflecting, S acquires (or becomes aware of) a host of beliefs about the truth-conditions of individual propositions. For S to come to know the universal proposition that every axiom of (CT_M) is true on this basis, S must rely upon a priori (inductive) argumentation. S must rely, that is, on a simple inference such as

- (1) the proposition that tables are solid is true iff tables are solid and the proposition that space—time is continuous is true iff space—time is continuous and so on, for every proposition that I've considered;
- (2) so every axiom of (CT_M) is true.

What's notable about this inference is that its premise is (equivalent to) a conjunction of instances of (ES). Let an instance of *conceptual argumentation* be an inference about *truth* whose premises consist solely of propositions that one must be disposed to accept in order to possess TRUTH or conjunctions thereof. Say that an inference about *truth* is an instance of *non-conceptual argumentation* otherwise. ¹⁵

¹⁴ For the notion of a worldly fact, see Dodd (2008) (who, of course, is no correspondence theorist).

 $^{^{15}}$ So note that the notion of conceptual argumentation is also of interest to deflationists who, in their accounts of тruth, highlight other schemas, e.g. 'Sentence "S" (of language \mathcal{L}) is true iff S'.

Putting the pieces together, what the minimalist should say is that *truth* is susceptible only to a *transparent constitution theory*. A constitution theory for *truth* is transparent iff one who possesses the ordinary concept truth is *ipso facto* in a position to know that its axioms are true solely on the basis of conceptual argumentation. By contrast, a constitution theory for *truth* is *opaque* iff to know that its axioms are true, one who possesses truth must rely on (a priori or empirical) non-conceptual argumentation. Note then that the correspondence theorist will likely take (CT_{Corr}) to be an opaque constitution theory, since one would presumably come to know that its axiom is true via non-conceptual, metaphysical argumentation about e.g. isomorphic correspondence and worldly facts. In turn, the thesis about *truth*'s constitution that the moderate deflationist should advance is

(Unconstituted) There is a property *truth*, but it is insusceptible to an opaque constitution theory.

As we've seen, (Unconstituted) poses a serious threat to the traditional essence project. Since the minimalist is committed to this thesis and it is compatible with the other existing species of moderate deflationism, (Unconstituted) satisfies the Deflationary Constraint. It also satisfies the Metaphysical Constraint, since it deals directly with the nature—specifically, the constitution—of *truth*. In what follows—and most significantly in Section III.3—we'll see that (Unconstituted) satisfies the Special Case Constraint as well. 17

- (a) For all subjects S and propositions p: S's knowing p consists in S's having a justified, true belief in p and
- (b) (a) is knowable via inference from the premise (where Mary is an arbitrary cognizer) 'Mary knows that tables are solid iff she has a justified, true belief that tables are solid; Mary knows that space–time is continuous iff she has a justified, true belief that space–time is continuous, and so on for every proposition that I've considered'.

Is (a)+(b) a deflationary view of knowledge? Maybe, but we'd need to know more to be sure. In particular, we'll need to know what S' takes the possession-conditions of the ordinary concept knowledge to be. They might suggest that one could possess knowledge while not being disposed to accept the premise mentioned in (b), since docastic justification is a sophisticated, theoretical concept that many ordinary cognizers lack while nevertheless possessing knowledge. In that case, our theorist would presumably regard (a) as the axiom of an opaque constitution theory for (propositional) knowledge and to that extent, they'd be treating knowledge as a substantial relation. Yet since my major concern here is with truth rather than knowledge, I leave these issues for future study.

¹⁶ Indeed, I take Asay (2013: 117–18, 126–7, 131), Dodd (*ibid.*), Künne (2003: 92) and Williams (2002: 151) to have sympathies towards (Unconstituted).

¹⁷ An anonymous referee wonders whether similar considerations apply in connection with other properties/relations, e.g. knowledge. In particular, they consider a theorist *S'* who advances the following view.

III.3 Lack of explanatory power

Moderate deflationists regularly contend that *truth* is 'non-explanatory'. ¹⁸ Here, they are also driven by a desire to undercut the essence project. Traditional truth theorists sought to discover *truth*'s essence because they took *truth* to be a kind of skeleton key. They thought that uncovering *truth*'s essence would reveal significant facts about many other philosophically central topics—rationality, epistemic justification, belief, assertion, theoretical success, successful action, communication, logic, explanation, reality, and the list goes on. Such projects have encountered serious problems to say the least, which indicates to moderate deflationists that they represent a degenerating research programme. The culprit, say moderate deflationists, is not ignorance on our part as to the essence of a property *truth* that enjoys metaphysically significant yet deeply elusive explanatory power. Rather, it is our persistent misconception that *truth* has such explanatory power at all. Put concisely, the contention here is ¹⁹

(Non-Explanatory) There is a property *truth*, but *truth* lacks explanatory power in that there are no facts that are explained by facts about *truth*'s essence.

It's thus fitting that one regularly sees moderate deflationists arguing that where it might seem necessary to invoke truth's essence to explain some important fact, we really need to do no such thing. Many of us would agree, for instance, that true beliefs (together with appropriate desires) tend to facilitate successful action.²⁰ Yet a generalization such as this, argues Horwich (1998b: 141), is 'not focused on truth, not really about truth'. His contention is that while we do use 'true' in such explanatory contexts, we do so *only* because 'true' augments the expressive power of our language, allowing us e.g. to generalize about infinite classes of propositions. Dodd (2008: 133; see also ch. 6, §8) concurs, holding likewise that truth is 'nothing more than that whose expression in a language gives that language a device for the formulation of indirect and generalized assertions'. Williams (2002: §5) pursues a similar strategy when discussing truth-conditions and Davidson's principle of charity. Künne (2003: §5.1.1, 373; 2008: §13) takes great care to offer non-truth-theoretic accounts of propositions and propositional expression. And Asay (2013: §4.2, 108) appeals to considerations involving truthmaking, resemblance and causality to argue that we can refuse to posit a sparse property truth 'without sacrificing' explanatory power'.

 $^{^{18}}$ For discussion of this and the analogous claim about truth, see Bar-On, Horisk & Lycan (2000: 13–14), Brandom (2005), Devitt (1991), Field (1986: 67, 76, § §4.2–5.4; 1994: Postscript, §7), Grover (1992: §3.1), Horsten (2011: §7.4), Horwich (1998b: ch. 3; 2010: 6–7, 13–16), Künne (2008: §13), Legel (1978: esp. § §III and IV), Lynch (2009: 107, 111) and Shapiro (1998).

¹⁹ Cp. Lynch (2009: 108) and Williams (2002: 158).
²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I foreground this issue.

(Non-Explanatory), as we've seen, would undercut a major aim of the essence project. Since extant moderate deflationists are highly sympathetic towards this thesis, (Non-Explanatory) thus satisfies the Deflationary Constraint. It also satisfies the Metaphysical Constraint, as it's a direct (negative) claim about *truth*'s nature, rather than a claim about 'true' or TRUTH.

I'd like to stress that (Non-Explanatory) and (Unconstituted) are mutually non-entailing and that for this reason, we must be careful not to suppose that a commitment to one automatically enjoins a commitment to the other. I'll illustrate this by appealing to *countermodels*. In the present sense, a 'model' is just a *logically possible* state of affairs; so my usage of 'model' here is much less formal than the typical usage. I take it that the states of affairs described below are consistent, since considering their details generates no impressions of inconsistency. Also, the 'models' below aren't intended, of course, to be entirely deflationism-friendly—quite the contrary, since each is meant to show that one characteristically deflationary thesis is consistent with the negation of another.

First, here's a countermodel with three main details which shows that (Unconstituted) doesn't entail (Non-Explanatory).

- $(M_1(i))$ S possesses truth iff S is disposed to accept in the absence of supporting argumentation the proposition that:
 - (3) For all x: x's being true consists in x's representing an actual state of affairs.
- $(M_1(ii))$ The true constitution theory for *truth* is transparent as its sole axiom is the proposition that:²²
 - (CT_R) For all x: x's being true consists in x's representing an actual state of affairs.
- $(M_1(iii))$ Truth enjoys explanatory power in virtue of the explanatory power enjoyed by representation and states of affairs. We can, for instance, explain why it is desirable to believe the proposition that tables are solid by appealing to the desirability of believing propositions that represent (only) actual states of affairs.

The driving idea behind this model is that it would seem logically possible that given the details of its constitution theory, *truth* enjoys explanatory power even as that constitution theory is transparent. This would be a case in which (Unconstituted) is true yet (Non-Explanatory) is false.

Likewise, (Non-Explanatory) doesn't entail (Unconstituted). Here's a countermodel:

 $^{^{21}}$ This isn't to contend that there are no interesting inductive or abductive relations between them—perhaps there are. The point remains that they are mutually non-entailing. 22 Note that (CTR)'s form deviates harmlessly from that of (CT).

 $(M_2(i))$ Truth lacks explanatory power.

 $(M_2(ii)) = (M_1(i)).$

 $(M_2(iii))$ Truth is susceptible to an opaque constitution theory, namely (CT_M) .

Here the idea is that it's logically possible that truth , as the minimalist claims, lacks explanatory power and that (CT_M) is the true constitution theory for truth , though this constitution theory is opaque. (CT_M) is an opaque constitution theory in this model because given $(M_2(ii))$, S might possess truth while lacking the concept proposition and hence while failing to know that propositions can bear truth . This indicates that to come to know that (CT_M) 's axioms are true, S would need to rely upon non-conceptual, a priori argumentation, namely that which would suffice for S to know that propositions are bearers of truth . In this model, then, while (Non-Explanatory) is true, (Unconstituted) is false.

The overall point to appreciate here is that (Unconstituted) and (Non-Explanatory) codify two logically distinct senses in which the moderate deflationist might hold that *truth* is an insubstantial property. Given this, it follows that neither thesis is a special case of the other. Thus, if they alone satisfy the Deflationary and Metaphysical Constraints (as I'll maintain in Section IV), then each also satisfies the Special Case Constraint.

III.4 Abundance

In recent discussions of the metaphysics of deflationism, Edwards (2013) and Asay (2013: ch. 4) have proposed that the definitive moderate deflationary thesis about *truth* is²³

(Abundant) *Truth* exists, but *truth* is a highly abundant/unnatural property.

This account is tempting, given that Horwich (1998b: 11, 37) explicitly contrasts *truth* with what he calls 'naturalistic properties', e.g. *being a tree*. However, certain aspects of (Abundant) fail to intersect with the concerns of moderate deflationists, while the others are mere special cases of a more basic moderate deflationary commitment.

In seminal work, Lewis (1983) took the distinction between sparse and abundant properties to be graded, with sparseness and abundance being inverses—properties are more or less sparse than other properties and the degree to which a property is sparse is the inverse of the degree to which it is abundant. At one extreme, Lewis contended, we have properties—presumably those taken to be fundamental by the final physics—that are maximally sparse or, in Lewis'

²³ Lynch (2006: 68) once made a similar proposal, that deflationists take the truths to fail to constitute a 'minimally objective kind'.

For the sake of continuity, I'll mostly follow Edwards and Asay in speaking about *truth* being highly abundant, rather than 'highly unnatural', though the latter terminology may be preferable in this context.

terminology, *perfectly natural*. At the other, we have properties—nicely exemplified by Nelson Goodman's famous property *grueness*—that are disjunctive and gerrymandered and thus maximally abundant.

To navigate this spectrum, we need diagnostics that indicate how sparse a given property is. Edwards (2013: 12) draws on three Lewisian diagnostics, taking the extent to which P is sparse to be determined by²⁴

- (S1) the length of P's chain of definability from the perfectly natural properties (the length of this chain is negatively correlated with P's degree of sparseness);
- (S2) whether P grounds 'genuine similarities' among its bearers; and
- (S₃) whether P enjoys causal-explanatory power.

Part of the trouble here is that even if moderate deflationists are committed to holding that the definability chain connecting *truth* to the perfectly natural properties is rather long, certain traditional truth theorists are presumably committed to the same. If the perfectly natural properties are those that the final physics will take as fundamental, it's reasonable to predict that the definability chain connecting these properties to, say, *being isomorphic to a worldly fact* would be rather long. A correspondence theorist who articulates correspondence along these lines would then agree that *truth* can't be simply defined in terms of the perfectly natural properties. In this respect, then, (Abundant) isn't a suitably deflationary thesis about *truth* in the sense of the Deflationary Constraint.²⁵

Admittedly, (S2) is closer to home. Moderate deflationists should deny that *truth* grounds genuine similarities among its bearers, at least if grounding is as closely tied to explanation as many (e.g. Fine 2012) have thought. But what this brings to light is that if moderate deflationists are committed to (S2), this is just an upshot of their commitment to denying that *truth* enjoys explanatory power, i.e. to (Non-Explanatory).

The same goes for (\$\hat{S}_3\$). Presumably, moderate deflationists are committed to denying that *truth* enjoys causal-explanatory power. ²⁶ But this is a consequence

²⁴ Admittedly, there are other conceptions of natural/sparse properties that might be considered here; see e.g. Dorr & Hawthorne (2013) and Schaffer (2004) for insightful discussions of sparseness, abundance and naturalness. These deserve further scrutiny, but given space constraints and because it has been specifically developed in connection with *truth*, I'll concentrate on Edwards' proposal here.

²⁵ It might seem that the moderate deflationist must hold that the definability chain connecting truth to the perfectly natural properties is infinitely long. After all, the class of (ES)'s instances—the minimalist's implicit definition of truth—has an infinite cardinality. By contrast, the thought would go, the correspondence theorist can go in for a finitary, explicit definition of truth, e.g. (CT_{Corr}). Yet even if the minimalist is committed to an infinitely long definability chain (and I'm sceptical here), a moderate deflationist can in fact endorse a finitary, explicit definition of truth, Künne (2003; 337) being a key witness. Thanks to Jamin Asay for raising this issue.

²⁶ See Damnjanovic (2005, 2010: esp. §3.1) for discussion of some related complications that are compatible with this suggestion.

of their contention that *truth* lacks *any* sort of explanatory power—it's a special case of their more basic commitment to (Non-Explanatory).²⁷

What this shows is that treating (Abundant) as a core moderate deflationary commitment would create problems in connection with the Deflationary and Special Case Constraints. In one respect, (Abundant) isn't a suitably deflationary thesis and the respects in which it is deflationary are special cases of the more fundamental (Non-Explanatory). Before drawing the conclusion that the core of moderate deflationism consists of (Unconstituted) and (Non-Explanatory), we'll consider finally a fifth claim about *truth* that has been associated with the view—that *truth* is merely 'logical'.

III.5 Logicality

A number of deflationists have claimed that *truth* is a 'logical' property.²⁸ A difficulty here is that those who advance this claim rarely indicate what they take the characteristic features of logical properties to be. To rectify this, we can consider what is perhaps the most influential account of the boundary between the logical and the non-logical, that proposed by Tarski.

Tarski's view of what he calls 'logical notions' is inspired by the account of geometrical notions stemming from Felix Klein's Erlanger Program. Klein's idea is that we can classify the notions distinctive of particular branches of geometry by reference to the sorts of *transformations* under which those notions are invariant. As the term is used in this context (Tarski 1986: 186), a transformation is a one—one function whose domain and range are each identical to the particular universe of discourse at issue.

Tarski's insight is that Klein's strategy can be generalized to deliver an account of what makes a notion logical. Tarski (1986: 147) uses 'notion' rather broadly, so that for him, notions approximate what we usually describe as 'entities' or 'things'. He describes his account of logical notions as follows (Tarski 1986: 149):

Now suppose we continue [Klein's] idea, and consider still wider classes of transformations. In the extreme case, we would consider the class of all one—one transformations of the space, or universe of discourse, or 'world', onto itself. What will be the science which deals with the notions invariant under this widest class of transformations? Here

²⁷ The points of the above two paragraphs are consistent with Asay (2013: ch. 4) 's contention that (S2) and (S3) enjoy unique motivations. Our present aim is to characterize the core commitments of moderate deflationism, and in this connection, (Non-Explanatory) is more basic than (S2) and (S3).

²⁸ See Damnjanovic (2005, 2010), Künne (2003: 91, 338; 2008: 130) (though he calls *truth* a 'quasi-logical' or 'broadly logical' property) and McGinn (2000: ch. 5) (though see footnote 4). For related discussion, see Beall (2013), Field (1986: 76; 1992: 322; 1994: §5), Hill (2002: 22), Horsten (2011: § §5,2.3, 10.2.1) and Horwich (1998b: 2–5, 142).

²⁹ Tarski intends to exclude linguistic and conceptual entities from the class of notions.

we will have very few notions, all of a very general character. I suggest that they are the logical notions, that we call a notion 'logical' if it is invariant under all possible one—one transformations of the world onto itself.

For Tarski, a notion is logical just if it is invariant under all possible transformations of the world onto itself. We might call these *total transformations*, since they map the world onto the world.

A property P is logical in this sense iff where f(x) is a total transformation, if f(x) maps a to f(a) and a instantiates P, then so does f(a). A clear instance of such a property is being self-identical. Another plausible candidate is being everything. If there is an unrestricted universal quantifier \forall , we could take it to denote being everything. A total transformation f(x) maps every entity a in the world onto another entity f(a) in the world. Since no such entity instantiates being everything—every such entity is in the world, though it isn't identical to the world—for every such a, if f(x) maps a to f(a) and a instantiates being everything, then so does f(a). Existence—which we could take to be denoted by the unrestricted existential quantifier \exists —is also a logical property in the present sense, given that the actual world contains only existent objects.

By contrast, intuitively non-logical properties like *being a tree*, *being blue* and *being solid* are clearly non-logical in the present sense. There is a total transformation that maps everything in the world onto itself, except the tree in my mother's front yard and a point three miles north of the tree's base, which are mapped to one another. There is another that maps everything to itself, except the blue sweater in my closet and the green sweater in my closet, which are mapped to one another. And there is a third that maps everything to itself, except the table in my living room and the Pacific Ocean, which are mapped to one another.

So far so good. We have in hand a conception of logical properties that classifies several intuitively logical properties as logical and several intuitively non-logical properties as non-logical.³⁰ The hypothesis to consider now is that according to the moderate deflationist, *truth* is a logical property in the Tarskian sense, i.e.

(Logical) Truth is invariant under all possible total transformations.

It would, in fact, be a mistake to associate (Logical) with moderate deflationism. This is because, as with (Transparent_{L/D}) and (Unconstituted*), the minimalist is committed to denying (Logical). Supposing with the minimalist that propositions exist, there is a total transformation that maps the

³⁰ This conception may not simply mirror common philosophical opinion as to which properties—e.g. *being a unicorn* or *being a conjunctive proposition*—are (non-)logical. This can be reasonably regarded as a cost, yet as Sher (2008: esp. 308–24) points out, the Tarskian conception of logicality does fare rather well in connection with other important desiderata such as systematicity and linguistic and mathematical fruitfulness.

proposition that tables are solid to the proposition that 7+5=13. Since tables are, in fact, solid, the former instantiates *truth*, according to the minimalist, in contrast to the latter. This shows that for the minimalist, *truth* isn't invariant under all possible total transformations.³¹ For this reason, (Logical) fails to satisfy the Deflationary Constraint.

It may be that when they talk about the logicality of *truth*, moderate deflationists have a distinctively metaphysical, non-Tarskian conception of logicality in mind that would avoid the concern just raised. If so, then their burden is to indicate what precisely this conception amounts to.³² Since at present, no such conception has been forthcoming, I propose (defeasibly) that we refrain from associating the claim that *truth* is logical with moderate deflationism.

IV. THE FACES OF MODERATE DEFLATIONISM

I hope in the foregoing discussion to have shed some light on what is at stake in contemporary debates about deflationary theories of truth. We've distinguished two fundamental senses in which the moderate deflationist might take truth to be an insubstantial property. They might regard truth as being insusceptible to an opaque constitution theory or as being devoid of explanatory power. A consequence of this analysis is that there are two theses about truth that are each partially definitive of the view. We can say approximately that being a moderate deflationist amounts to endorsement of the following conjunction:

(MD) There is a property truth, but it is insusceptible to an opaque constitution theory and lacks explanatory power.

A more perspicuous way to think about moderate deflationism, however, is to treat it as consisting of two separable faces. One is a moderate deflationist to the fullest degree, we can say, if one endorses both (Unconstituted) and (Non-Explanatory). Yet as we noted in Section III.3, one might reasonably endorse one of these theses while rejecting the other. Both theses satisfy the Deflationary and Metaphysical Constraints, meaning that an advocate of either aim to jeopardize the essence project by advancing a distinctively metaphysical claim about *truth*. We should thus think of someone who endorses one but not the other as being a moderate deflationist—though not to the fullest degree. I suggest then that there are three fundamental ways to be a moderate deflationist: (i) endorse both (Unconstituted) and (Non-Explanatory); (ii) endorse (Unconstituted) and reject (Non-Explanatory) and

³¹ This result clearly generalizes to any theory of *truth* that entails the (non-paradoxical) instances of (ES).

³² Note in this connection that the claim that *truth* is denoted by a 'formal' truth predicate whose meaning is defined inferentially à la Beall (2009: 1; 2013) would fail to satisfy the Metaphysical Constraint.

reject (Unconstituted). If this is correct, then the particularly fascinating question here is not 'Should we be moderate deflationists?' but 'To what degree and in which senses (if any) should we be moderate deflationists?'

V. EDWARDS AGAINST (UNCONSTITUTED)

I'd like to close by considering a pair of objections to this analysis based on recent work by Douglas Edwards. Edwards and I agree that (Unconstituted*) [in addition to (Transparency $_{L/D}$) and (Logical)] isn't a characteristic moderate deflationary thesis. Yet the concerns that Edwards raises for (Unconstituted*), if cogent, would apply equally to (Unconstituted). Edwards is thus committed to denying that (Unconstituted) is even partially definitive of moderate deflationism. But I'll explain why I think that his misgivings here miss the mark.

Edwards suggests (Edwards 2013: $\S5$) that a property might have a true constitution theory while nevertheless being rather abundant, citing being jade as an illustration. There are two minerals which we ordinarily call 'jade', jadeite and nephrite. So provided that we countenance disjunctive properties, being jade is susceptible to a constitution theory (CT_{jade}) whose sole axiom is the proposition that

(JCT) For all *x*: *x*'s instantiating *being jade* consists in *x*'s instantiating *being jadeite or being nephrite*.

Given that our ordinary concept JADE is insensitive to the distinctness of jadeite and nephrite, we would come to know that (CT_{jade})'s axiom is true via empirical, chemical inquiry. Thus, (CT_{jade}) is an opaque constitution theory in a sense analogous to that sketched in Section III.2.

Yet being jade looks to be rather abundant. Jadeite and nephrite are chemically dissimilar, so being jade presumably fails to ground genuine similarities among its bearers. Moreover, as it's a disjunctive property, it's reasonable to hold that its disjunct properties, rather than being jade itself, pull the weight in causal explanations, so that being jade lacks causal-explanatory power.

Edwards' worry is that we might obtain a similar result in connection with truth: *truth* might be susceptible to an opaque constitution theory yet be rather abundant.³³ Given this and the assumption that (Unconstituted) captures what it would mean for *truth* to be insubstantial, we would be forced to make the awkward claim that *truth* might be substantial [owing to the falsity of (Unconstituted)], yet rather abundant. Yet if *truth* is rather abundant, then *truth* is like *being jade* or *grueness*—hardly among the elite, highly natural

 $^{^{33}}$ Again, Edwards focuses on (Unconstituted*) rather than (Unconstituted), but as we've shown, his case applies equally to (Unconstituted).

properties. So how could it be right, Edwards wonders, to say in this case that *truth* is a substantial property?

I don't see this as much of a concern. Substantiality, in the present context, is a purely theoretical notion. ³⁴ Given that the moderate deflationist's theoretical aim here is to undermine the essence project, it's perfectly appropriate for them to take the issue as to whether *truth* is substantial to revolve around (Unconstituted) and (Non-Explanatory), for the truth of either would severely jeopardize that project. In other theoretical contexts—e.g. distinguishing *being jade* from, say, *having negative charge*—sparseness may have a significant role to play. That's perfectly compatible with the fact that for moderate deflationists, considerations as to *truth*'s sparseness take a backseat to those involving *truth*'s constitution and explanatory power. So while the fan of the sparse/abundant distinction may certainly introduce a notion of substantiality centred upon sparseness, it's question-begging to impose this notion upon the moderate deflationist. ³⁵

Edwards' second concern is that if (Unconstituted*) [and the same goes for (Unconstituted)] were definitive of moderate deflationism, then primitivist views of *truth* [e.g. those of the early Moore (1899) and Russell (1904)] would come out as deflationary, contrary to the standard policy among truth theorists of separating primitivist and deflationary theories (though see Greimann 2000). Primitivists about *truth*, the thought goes, take *truth* to be unanalysable and will accordingly deny that *truth* can be analysed by way of any sort of constitution theory. ³⁶ But then taking (Unconstituted) to be definitive of moderate deflationism collapses the distinction between primitivism and moderate deflationism.

Again, I'm unmoved. Since (Unconstituted) is logically distinct from (Non-Explanatory), the primitivist might resist moderate deflationism to the extent that they deny (Non-Explanatory).³⁷ In taking (Unconstituted) to be *partially* definitive of moderate deflationism, we're thus able to uphold a significant boundary between primitivism and moderate deflationism.

It might be worried that still, according to the present analysis, the primitivist does endorse moderate deflationism to some degree. But this seems like exactly the right result. If *truth* is insusceptible to an opaque constitution theory, then the essence project is seriously misguided. So in endorsing (Unconstituted), the primitivist would indeed deflate traditional inquiry about *truth* to a considerable

³⁴ Thanks especially to Jc Beall, Doug Edwards and Michael Lynch for impressing upon me the importance of this point.

³⁵ Edwards raises the converse concern that a fundamental physical property might be insusceptible to a constitution theory while nevertheless being intuitively 'substantial' in virtue of being rather sparse. But this too presupposes a conception of substantiality that the moderate defationist can legitimately reject.

³⁶ Indeed, the primitivist will presumably go even further than the minimalist in connection with *truth*'s constitution, rejecting even the minimal constitution theory of truth (Section III.2).

³⁷ Asay (2013; §3.2, ch. 8) advances the similar view that TRUTH, though it is a primitive concept, enjoys explanatory power (in contrast to *truth*, which he takes to be devoid of explanatory power).

extent. For this reason, there looks, contra Edwards, to be a significant (though non-total) overlap between moderate deflationism and primitivism.

VI. CONCLUSION

My aim in this discussion has been to make headway in the evaluation of deflationism. Focusing so intently on 'true' and TRUTH, I've argued, moderate deflationists and their critics have paid insufficient attention to a number of pressing metaphysical issues concerning *truth* that arise for moderate deflationists. Contrary to several influential defences and critiques of the view, moderate deflationists are committed neither to taking *truth* to be metaphysically transparent, insusceptible to a constitution theory nor logical (in a standard, Tarskian sense). Minimalists, in particular, should oppose each of these views. And the view that *truth* is abundant is, in this context, part red herring and part special case. Rather, one commits to moderate deflationism to the degree that one takes *truth* to lack an opaque constitution theory and explanatory power. To make progress in debates about deflationism, it's vital that we assess separately what are, in fact, separable commitments.³⁸

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³⁸ Many eyes have seen versions of this paper. In addition to those mentioned above, thanks to Colin Caret, Michael Conboy, Casey Johnson, Michael Hughes, Junyeol Kim, Toby Napoletano, Nikolaj Pedersen, Paul Silva, two anonymous referees for *The Philosophical Quarterly*, as well as audiences at Brown University, the 2013 Pacific APA, the University of Connecticut, and Yonsei University. Special thanks to Michael Lynch for his gracious mentorship. This work was supported in part by the National Research Foundation of Korea (The Pluralisms Global Research Network, grant no. 2013S1A2A203551) and (in part) by Yonsei University Research Fund of 2014.

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