

Answering the Conceptual Challenge: Three Strategies for Deflationists

Abstract: We defend deflationism about truth (or, more precisely, truth-*talk*) against a pressing challenge, which is to explain how deflationists can understand the role that the *concept* of truth appears to play in accounts of several other philosophically important concepts. We provide three strategies that deflationists can employ in response to the specific challenge that Bar-On and Simmons and others have raised regarding the concept of assertion. We then show how to extend our strategies to accounts of other central concepts. The result is a set of recipes for deflationists about truth to employ in developing responses to worries that might be raised about the explanatory role of the truth concept.

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0. Introduction

Our aim here is to defend deflationism about truth (~~henceforth, Deflationism~~) against a pressing challenge regarding how deflationists can understand the role that the *concept* of truth appears to play in accounts of other philosophically important concepts, for example, logical validity, knowledge, and belief. We develop three different strategies that a Deflationist can apply in addressing this issue, focusing initially on the specific challenge pertaining to the truth concept's putative role in an adequate account of assertion. After answering this specific challenge, we indicate how our responses to it can be extended to similar challenges pertaining to other concepts. If we are right, then Deflationists have several strategies for responding to the worry regarding the putative explanatory role of the truth concept.

The plan is as follows. §1 lays out our understanding of Deflationism and explains a clarifying trio of distinctions. §2 extends our discussion of the distinctions and provides reasons for favoring a particular priority thesis within it over a separation thesis. §3 turns to the contention that the concept of truth plays a central role in Frege's account of assertion and introduces a first Deflationary strategy for dealing with the connection between the truth concept and assertion. §4 addresses Robert Brandom's use of the truth concept in his account of assertion and presents a second Deflationary strategy for relating these concepts. §5 presents a third Deflationary strategy for relating the concepts of truth and assertion, §6 explains how our Deflationary strategies extend to challenges stemming from other concepts, and §7 concludes.

1. Deflationism

On our understanding of Deflationism, it is a different kind of approach than the traditional one because it is not actually a *theory of truth*.¹ This holds for two reasons. The first is because Deflationism is not a theory at all. Rather, the term denotes a *genus* of which various theories are its species. (A main rival to Deflationism is the genus of *T-inflationism* the species of which include correspondence theories of truth, coherence theories of truth, pragmatist theories of truth, primitivist theories of truth, etc.) The second is because the species that Deflationism comprises are best understood as various theories of truth-*talk*, which is that fragment of discourse that employs what we will call the “alethic locutions” (‘is true’ and ‘is false’), rather than as theories of a property of truth (or of falsity).

T-inflationary views, which encompass the traditional theories of truth, presuppose that ‘is true’ is a descriptive predicate that expresses an explanatory concept of truth, which in turn determines a substantive truth property. The various T-inflationary theories typically then go on to provide different accounts of the supposed truth property. One consequence of the assumption that ‘is true’ is a descriptive predicate is that there is no meaning equivalence between a sentence (or utterance, proposition, belief, etc.) and an ascription of truth to it. As a consequence, for T-inflationists, a truth attribution like “‘Snow is white’ is true” *says more* than its target sentence, ‘Snow is white’, does. T-inflationists will, of course, accept *some* sort of equivalence between every sentence (utterance, proposition, etc.) and an ascription of truth to

¹ What follows is our view of what Deflationism consists in. For defenses of this view, see *blinded*. We recognize that other theorists have different views what about what constitutes Deflationism. Our hope is the readers of our paper will appreciate the merits of the view that we espouse towards this approach to truth-talk. If not, rest assured that everything we say by way of our defense of Deflationism is compatible with other views of that approach.

it, an equivalence expressed by the instances of the theorist's preferred version of the generalized truth schema,

(TS) [p] is true iff p,

where the square-brackets stand for some unspecified nominalizing/naming device². But for T-inflationists, these equivalences are substantive and hold in virtue of the nature of the truth property attributed by the use of the truth-predicate.

The foregoing is in marked contrast with what Deflationists say about the instances of (TS), which is that they are in some sense fundamental. One way of distinguishing Deflationism from T-inflationism is by noting that only Deflationists take the instances of their favored version of (TS) to be “conceptually basic and explanatorily fundamental” (Cf. Paul Horwich (1998, p. 21, fn. 4)), or direct consequences of how the truth-predicate operates, logico-linguistically.³ Some Deflationists (e.g., Hartry Field (1994)) even endorse a kind of meaning equivalence between the left- and right-hand sides of their version of (TS). Deflationists thus reject the standard assumptions and presuppositions about truth-talk and the truth concept that generate inflationary theories of truth, and resist the latter's move to positing a substantive truth property. Deflationists instead offer novel understandings of the functioning of the alethic locutions and of the concepts they express, which is why the species of Deflationism are best understood as *meta*-theories of truth, that is, as theories of truth-talk and (derivatively) of the truth concept.

² We leave open the interpretation of the name-forming device encoded by the square-brackets in (TS) in virtue of the different things that various T-inflationary theories take as the primary bearers of some truth property. The same sort of diversity holds among Deflationists as well, albeit usually described in terms of what it is that truth-talk applies to, rather than in terms of “the bearers of the truth property”.

³ Cf. Kukla and Winsberg (2015, pp. 29-31).

The meta-theories that the different species of Deflationism offer diverge from one another in the alternative accounts they provide of the operation of the alethic locutions.⁴ There are also varieties or versions of each of these species, offering different details within the kind of meta-theory they develop. But there are common "deflating" themes that unify the many species (and varieties) within the genus of Deflationism. These can be organized in terms of a useful division, introduced by Dorit Bar-On and Keith Simmons (2007, pp. 61, 68) and discussed by Richard Heck (2021) and Jamin Asay (2018), between metaphysical deflationism, linguistic deflationism, and conceptual deflationism.

Metaphysical deflationism is the thesis that there is no substantive property of truth expressed by the alethic locution 'is true', or determined by the concept of truth. If Deflationists countenance a truth property at all, they take it to be a "thin", disunified (or "fragmented") one, as there is nothing that all of the true truth-bearers have in common in virtue of which they all count as true.⁵ *Linguistic deflationism* is a general thesis about the operation and function of the alethic locutions (e.g., 'is true' and 'is false'), which is sometimes explained as holding that these expressions operate merely as formal devices, playing a kind of logical role, rather than a descriptive one. (Cf. Field (1994), Horwich (1998), Leon Horsten (2011), and *blinded*) As we would elaborate this thesis, it amounts to the view that the fundamental linguistic functioning of the *truth-predicate*⁶ is exhausted by its role in

⁴ The species of Deflationism include at least disquotationalism, minimalism, prosententialism, and redundancy theories. (Cf. *blinded* and Bar-On and Simmons (2007, pp. 64-7))

⁵ Metaphysical deflationism has frequently been erroneously taken to be the core thesis of Deflationism, due to mistaking Deflationism for a theory of truth. By identifying Deflationism as a genus, of which various theories of truth-*talk* are the species, we conclude that metaphysical deflationism, while an aspect of Deflationism, is not its core thesis.

⁶ We use 'truth-predicate' in a neutral sense. The locution 'is true' is recognized as a *grammatical* predicate, even by Deflationists (e.g., Grover, *et al.* (1975) and Brandom (1994)) who reject the thesis that it functions as a

implementing a kind of *semantic descent*, where this notion is generalized to cover a variety of ways of denominalizing different kinds of nominalizations of content-vehicles, thereby transforming a mention of some content-vehicle into something equivalent to a use of it. Being such a device, when coupled with other resources (e.g., quantifiers), the truth-predicate has certain uses that enable speakers to express agreement (or disagreement) with a (potentially infinite) body of claims. These uses of the truth-predicate function as a natural-language surrogate for quantification into sentence positions, thereby performing a special kind of generalizing role. Finally, *conceptual deflationism*, as Bar-On and Simmons (Ibid., pp. 61-2), Asay (Ibid.) and Heck (Ibid.) explain it, is the view that the truth concept is “thin”, in the sense that what it takes to grasp that concept does not require much more than a disposition to accept all instances of some version of (TS), or to accept all of the inferences from a truth ascription to its truth-bearer and *vice versa*, or to accept their intersubstitutability (in most contexts). As a result, conceptual deflationism maintains that the truth concept has no explanation in terms of any other concepts, i.e., that it admits of no complex/reductive analysis, and it holds that the truth concept never plays a substantive role in explanations or accounts of any other concepts, which is what Bar-On and Simmons take to be the important upshot of the view.

2. Deflationism, the Separation Thesis, and the Priority Thesis

Although the aforementioned authors do not have much to say about metaphysical deflationism, Bar-On and Simmons argue for a separation thesis according to which one can

predicate *logically*. Many theorists even take the sentential-prefix expression ‘it is true that’ to employ a truth-predicate that gets applied to a proposition picked out by the ‘that’-clause formed when the expression is attached to a sentence, rather than functioning as a truth-operator. (Cf. Horwich (1998, pp. 6, 10, 17))

endorse linguistic deflationism without endorsing either conceptual or metaphysical deflationism. They take the views of Frege and Brandom to demonstrate this separability, by characterizing them both as endorsing linguistic deflationism while rejecting conceptual deflationism. (They further claim that Brandom endorses metaphysical deflationism but correctly hesitate to do the same with Frege.)

We reject their separation thesis and we claim that the views of Frege and Brandom demonstrate it. To understand our resistance to their thesis, consider what it would take to violate either metaphysical or conceptual deflationism. As Peter Achinstein (1983), Sylvain Bromberger (1966), Carl Hempel (1965), and many others have argued, answers to *why-questions* serve as explanations of some phenomena.⁷ If they are right, then a violation of metaphysical deflationism might occur when, or if, the truth-predicate figured essentially in an answer to a why-question, such as “Why is electron theory successful at predicting observations?”. If we could not, even in principle, avoid employing the truth-predicate to give an answer to this why-question, that would provide a reason for thinking that there is a property of truth that has a causal-explanatory role to play in an account of why the cited phenomenon occurs, which would be incompatible with metaphysical deflationism. In parallel with an answer to a why-question, an answer to a *what-question* can provide a different sort of explanation, one explaining what something is, or consists in, or amounts to, i.e., an analysis or account of it. A violation of conceptual deflationism might occur when, or if, the truth-predicate figured essentially in an answer to a what-question about some concept, for example, the question “What is knowledge?”. If the truth-predicate figured essentially in an account of what

⁷ Achinstein (*Ibid.*, p. 5) traces this idea back to Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Four Causes.

knowledge is, then there would be more to the concept of truth it expresses than conceptual deflationism allows. This would provide us with a reason for thinking that the truth concept has an explanatory role to play in our conceptual scheme.⁸ But notice that in these hypothetical violations of metaphysical and conceptual deflationism, the truth-*predicate* supposedly figured essentially in some explanatory account. If the truth-predicate were to do this, thereby specifying a genuinely explanatory factor instead of performing a merely expressive role, then it would not be functioning merely expressively, as a kind of logical device, which would constitute a violation of linguistic deflationism. This is why we reject Bar-On and Simmons's separation thesis: A violation of either metaphysical or conceptual deflationism would engender a violation of linguistic deflationism, both as we and as the other authors have described that thesis.

It follows that, if either conceptual or metaphysical deflationism are incorrect, then linguistic deflationism is incorrect. Contraposing (and assuming that we are not intuitionists), if linguistic deflationism is correct, then so, too, are conceptual and metaphysical deflationism.⁹ What this yields is that linguistic deflationism functions as a sufficient condition for metaphysical and conceptual deflationism, and their conjunction functions as a necessary

⁸ While we take these examples to illustrate what it would take to violate either metaphysical or conceptual deflationism, we do not think that these examples actually illustrate such violations. For a discussion of strategies for dealing with challenges to metaphysical deflationism, see *blinded*. We elaborate on defending conceptual deflationism, below.

⁹ Bar-On and Simmons (*Ibid.*, pp. 76-7) consider an argument along these lines but reject it in virtue of a distinction between a language one theorizes about and a language one theorizes in. They hold that it is possible to have a failure of linguistic deflationism only in the language one theorizes in while maintaining linguistic deflationism for the language one theorizes about. What they miss is that a failure of linguistic deflationism in the former is still a failure of linguistic deflationism *tout court*, so it seems that their separation thesis is actually undermined by their own considerations. Asay (2018) also seems to miss this point.

condition for linguistic deflationism.¹⁰ Hence, it seems that one cannot, consistently, endorse linguistic deflationism while denying either conceptual or metaphysical deflationism, and, as we claimed above, linguistic deflationism has a kind of priority over metaphysical and conceptual deflationism, contrary to what Bar-On and Simmons, et al have contended. However, it is still true that an argument against either metaphysical or conceptual deflationism will serve as an argument against Deflationism, since it will, *via modus tollens*, provide a reason for rejecting the linguistic deflationism that is the primary or central thesis of any Deflationary view. Thus, Deflationists must answer purported challenges to conceptual deflationism.

3. Deflationism and the Mark of Assertion

Some theorists¹¹ attribute to Frege the view that to assert is to present as true, and they also claim that, for Frege, the distinguishing mark of assertion—what sets it apart from other speech-acts—is that when we assert, we present what we have asserted as true. They further claim that if we follow this supposedly Fregean view on the concept of assertion, then one cannot understand what it is to assert without possessing the concept of truth. They see this (again, allegedly) Fregean identification of assertion with presenting as true as supporting the view that Frege rejects a version of conceptual deflationism.¹²

¹⁰ Philosophical controversies about properties and about the nature of explanation also suggest that neither metaphysical nor conceptual deflationism should be taken as the core of Deflationism. Richard Kirkham (1992, p. 311) points out that any nominalist is committed to a kind of metaphysical deflationism, but that will not necessarily also make her a Deflationist. Another version of this point arises from Huw Price's (2003) alethic fictionalism, as he endorses metaphysical deflationism but is not a Deflationist. With respect to the issue of explanation, Nic Damnjanovic (2005) claims that, on Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit's (1990) view of it, even a Deflationary account of the truth-predicate would count as giving truth an explanatory role. For more on accounts of explanation that would allow a Deflationary view to accept the concept of truth as explanatory, see *blinded*.

¹¹ Cf. Bar-On and Simmons (Ibid., p. 71) & Asay (Ibid.).

¹² We think that they are mistaken. Although, in various places in his corpus (e.g., Frege (1897, 1915, 1918)), Frege uses phrases like 'acknowledge to be true', when discussing judgment, and 'present as true', when discussing

By analogy with Timothy Williamson's (2000) *knowledge-first* view, we propose describing Frege (or, perhaps "Frege*", since we are not doing Fregean scholarship in this paper) as subscribing to what we will call an "assertion-first" view. According to Williamson's view, knowledge is prior to other cognitive or epistemic kinds, both conceptually and metaphysically. On his account, the concept of knowledge is *sui generis* and is a theoretical primitive. As a result, none of the proposed conditions for knowing, e.g., that knowledge involves justified true belief (plus some post-Gettier fourth condition), serves to characterize what knowledge is. According to this assertion-first view that we are attributing to Frege*, assertion is prior to any cognitive kinds or any other illocutionary acts, both conceptually and metaphysically. On this view, the concept of assertion is *sui generis* and is a theoretical primitive. As a result, none of the proposed conditions for asserting, e.g., that asserting involves presenting as true, serves to specify what assertion is. Since Frege*, as an assertion-first theorist, does not subscribe to the view that to assert is to present as true, he does not violate conceptual deflationism. After all, if assertion is indefinable, then the truth concept is not implicated as an answer to a what-question regarding assertion.

However, even granting that Frege* would not identify asserting with presenting as true, he does seem to subscribe to the weaker claim that when we assert, we present as true. While taking presenting as true to be merely a "distinguishing mark" of assertion poses no problem for conceptual deflationism, it might seem to challenge *linguistic* deflationism, since,

assertion, Bar-On and Simmons provide no textual evidence for the claim that Frege *identifies* asserting with presenting as true. This is for good reason, as some philosophers a number of philosophers (e.g., Mark Textor (2010), Nicholas Smith (2009), and William Taschek (2008)) have convincingly argued that Frege takes the concept of assertion to be *sui generis* and indefinable, i.e., a primitive notion that is not to be explained in terms of any other concepts.

in the phrase ‘present *as* true’, which is short for ‘present as *being* true’, the “gerundized” truth-predicate does not seem to be operating as a device of semantic descent, as Deflationists claim it does in our uses of ‘*is* true’. So, the question that presses is whether taking this use of ‘as true’ as a specification of Frege*’s distinguishing mark of assertion creates a problem for linguistic deflationism.

We contend that it does not. Frege* wants a way of distinguishing what we do when we assert from what we do when we perform other speech-acts, like questioning or commanding, and, for those purposes, he brings in the expression ‘as true’. What a Deflationist who follows Frege* on the indefinability of assertion needs, then, is a suitably deflationary way of identifying a feature of assertion that distinguishes it from the other speech-acts—in particular, a way of capturing the “as factual” aspect of assertion in contrast with the “as desired” or “as speculated” aspects of other sorts of speech-acts. As we will show in explaining what we call “Deflationary strategy #1”, this is possible because it turns out that Deflationists can mark what we are doing when we assert without enlisting the truth-predicate at all.

A tempting first thought, for a Deflationary response to the challenge of accounting for the mark of assertion, is to appeal to the core deflationary idea of semantic descent and contend that, for an assertoric utterance of a specified individual sentence, such as ‘Snow is white’, specifying the distinguishing mark here is accomplished by claiming that when you assert that snow is white, you present snow as being white. Similarly, one might contend, when you assert that whales are mammals, you present whales as being mammals. And so on, for all of the sentences that speakers can assertorically utter.

One might object to a version of this first thought, since one can assert, for example, that snow is white even when there is no snow in one's vicinity to present, which would seem to put pressure on the claim that this serves as an explanation of assertion.¹³ We can agree with the objector on this, but that is because our present goal is not to explain *what it is* to assert, since the strategy in play assumes that assertion is indefinable. Rather, the task at hand is to explain what one does when one asserts—that is, the effects, or the consequences, of asserting. And this point about the possibility of asserting in conditions of absence does nothing to undercut our contention that one can accomplish this task in suitably deflationary terms. In particular, regarding the “absence” point, we would note that just as one can indicate things that are not in one's vicinity by using language (e.g., indicating a conference one attended by talking about it), one can use language to *present* such things, in the sense of indicating them, as being various ways, e.g., talking about snow and presenting it as being white, even when there is none in the vicinity.¹⁴

While our first “semantic-descent-like” thought may seem promising, it leads to trouble because of the more serious “absence” problem that we sometimes, and unwittingly, assertorically utter sentences that involve vacuous expressions. When one assertorically utters ‘Vulcan is a planet’, she does not, and in fact cannot, present Vulcan as being a planet, since there is nothing to present (*pace*, Meinongianism). One possible response to this issue would

¹³ Cf. Bar-On and Simmons (Ibid., pp. 71-2 for a version of this objection.

¹⁴ If one objects to this permissive understanding of ‘presenting’ and claims that something must be in one's vicinity in order for her to present it, we would ask how, on that restrictive view, one can present propositions, given standard views about their nature. Assuming that there are propositions, the only way to present them would seem to be by somehow *indicating* them, and perhaps the only way to do that is with language. If so, then there is no reason to deny that this holds for other things, like snow. (Note that if our objector objects to our assumption of propositions, we would run the same argument by asking how she would present any of her thought-states to an audience except by indicating them *via* language.)

be to say that, in the case of assertoric utterances of ordinary, vacuous-name-containing sentences, nothing gets asserted. This would enable our first thought for a Deflationary response to go through, but we would not want to rest our defense of Deflationism on so restrictive a thesis. Fortunately, we can avoid doing so, as we make clear, below.

Instead of employing the restrictive, bullet-biting strategy just mentioned, one can specify the “as factual” aspect of asserting, the consequence that distinguishes it from other speech-acts, without appealing to truth-talk or to the truth concept *via* applying a particular Deflationary approach.¹⁵ The approach we have in mind derives from A.N. Prior’s (1971) analysis of truth-talk in terms (following Frank Ramsey (1927)) of sentential variables and quantifiers governing them, with its explicitly *adverbial* reading of the sentence-variables. Inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953, §134), Prior (1971, p. 38) took ‘This is *how* things are’ to be a “propositional variable”. In this vein, as a means for “improving standard English”, with respect to its “paucity of quantifiers”, Prior (1956, p. 201; 1971, p. 37) introduced a kind of adverbial quantification to govern variables for presentations of “how things are”. He coined the natural-language quantifier expressions ‘anywhether’, ‘everywhether’, and ‘somewhether’, derived from the question-word ‘whether’, along with a corresponding ‘th-’ answer-word, ‘thether’, to serve as the sentential variable they govern. On this approach, we can (as Ramsey did) understand a sentence like ‘Everything Jamal believes is true’ quasi-formally in terms of ‘For all p, if Jamal believes that p, then p’ (Cf. Prior (1971, p. 24)), which can be rendered non-

¹⁵ We are not claiming that what follows is the *only* way for a Deflationist to respond to the claim that one must use truth-talk in providing an answer to the what-question regarding assertion; we are only saying that this is *one* way to do so. As will become apparent, we also think that, given that the issue is accounting for the adverbial phrase ‘as true’, what follows is also a particularly apt way to do so.

formally using Prior's neologisms as 'If Jamal believes that somewhether, then thether' or 'For anywhether, if Jamal believes that thether, then thether'. A sentence like 'What she believed is true' expresses 'For some p, she believed that p, and p', which would be rendered neologically as 'She believed that somewhether, and thether'.

We do not have to go all the way to employing Prior's adverbial neologisms, however, in order to implement the kind of adverbial strategy that we want to apply here.¹⁶ Following Stephen Yablo's (1996) initial appeal to ordinary "how-talk" in accounting for ways-talk or possible-worlds-talk, we can do something similar here in discussing assertion. One can see how our semantic-descent-like first thought for a Deflationary strategy for specifying the distinguishing mark of assertion can be presented in a generalized form using how-talk, *viz.*, in terms of "presenting things as being somehow". Recognizing the problem that vacuous expressions present, the next move is to modify the account as follows: What distinguishes assertion from other illocutionary acts is a matter of this speech-act being a way of indicating how *the world* is, at least from the perspective of an assertor. We do this, when we assert, by presenting *the world* as being somehow. Thus, adding a bit more fineness of grain, our proposal is that when we assert, we present the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow.

For a specific individual case, such as asserting that snow is white, we can say that when we do that we present the world as being such that, in it, snow is white. This proposal avoids the problem that vacuous name-containing sentences presented for our first thought. This is because the claim, that when we assert that Vulcan is a planet, we present the world as being

¹⁶ An adverbial understanding of truth-talk has historical precedents in Brentano (1904) and Kotarbiński (1929). (Cf. Kühne (2003), pp. 209, 343-7). Prior's version of the approach was developed further by C.J.F. Williams (1976, 1992).

such that, in it, Vulcan is a planet, does not require that there actually be anything that answers to ‘Vulcan’. The same goes for sentences that contain vacuous predicates. When we assert that some of the abilities that Houdini has are magical, we present the world as being such that, in it, some of Houdini’s abilities are magical.¹⁷

So, to achieve Frege’s goal of specifying the distinguishing mark of assertion, we do not need to enlist the truth-predicate. A possible worry one might have about our proposal, however, is that it smuggles in an appeal to a substantive notion or property of truth, just using different language. More specifically, the worry is that the way we claim that a Deflationist can capture the “as factual” feature of assertion—in term of presenting the world as being (such that, in it, things are) somehow—really just amounts to an account of *representing* the world and offering such a representation as capturing how the world is, that is, getting the world (or things, or “the facts”) right. But this seems a lot like an appeal to a notion of truth, now manifested in talk of representations getting presented as accurately representing the world.

To assuage this worry about our proposal, we note that the different qualifier phrases that get employed, in distinguishing different assertions, fragment what is involved in different acts of assertion so as to undercut the possibility of reconstructing a unified notion of truth. The adverbial specification of ‘as being such that, in it, snow is white’ does not involve the same factors as the adverbial specification of ‘as being such that, in it, Vulcan is a planet’. The difference is not just that ‘Vulcan’ is a vacuous term while ‘snow’ is not; there is also a difference in the factors involved in the first adverbial specification and that of ‘as being such

¹⁷ *Nota bene*: Precisely how the world would have to be such that, in it, Vulcan is a planet, or such that, in it, some of Houdini’s abilities are magical, is not our concern here.

that, in it, snow is cold'. This "disunity" point is related to the familiar Deflationary thesis that, while there may be a set of truths, and, in that sense, an extension of the locution 'is true', the elements of the set are not members of it for any common reason.¹⁸ They form a set of truths only in the sense that, for different reasons, a nominalization of each can correctly have the truth-predicate appended to it (to denominalize the nominalization, as it were). So, the existence of such a set would violate neither metaphysical nor linguistic deflationism. Similarly, different adverbial specifications are made in characterizing the distinguishing consequences of different assertions, and the differences are integral in each case to what gets done when one makes that assertion. So, it is not the case that the same thing gets done whenever one asserts, despite the existence of a set of the distinguishing consequences of assertions and the possibility of using how-talk to "generalize" over its members. As a result, there is no unified notion of the sort that one could consider a reconstruction of a substantive truth concept or property at work here, smuggled in to play an explanatory role in our proposal.

A residual concern one might have at this point is that the "fragmented" Deflationary understanding of what 'somehow' covers that we just explained will make the notion of assertion fragmented as well, meaning that there is no genuinely unified speech-act of assertion. But this particular fragmentation worry is not legitimate. Since deflationary strategy #1 takes assertion to be indefinable, our present proposal offers only a deflationary account of a *consequence* of what we do when we assert; it does not offer an analysis of what assertion is. So, even if deflationary strategy #1 fragments this consequence, that need not result in a fragmentation of assertion itself. Thus, generalizing on the distinguishing marks of particular

¹⁸ Cf. Kukla and Winsberg (2015, p. 30).

assertions by using how-talk in the way we have indicated avoids violating linguistic, metaphysical, or conceptual deflationism.

The how-talk generalization used to specify what is unique about assertion in general employs a rough and not-quite-regimented kind of adverbial quasi-quantification already available in natural language (e.g., English) *via* its use of the expression ‘somehow’.¹⁹ But, while the ‘some’ component of this expression suggests quantification, this is not ordinary quantification over a domain of “hows”, since there are no such entities. Moreover, since there is no corresponding variable expression governed by the adverbial quasi-quantifiers, they also cannot be interpreted as substitutional quantifiers, thereby avoiding various controversies confronting that approach.²⁰ The generalizing here is essentially adverbial, rather than objectual (or substitutional). This makes it “clunkier”—less fine-grained and less flexible—than the kind of generalizing one gets with objectual quantification (or even with substitutional quantification).

To improve on this “clunkiness” when theorizing about what we do when we assert, one might want to incorporate what the adverbial quasi-quantification covers into one’s account *via* a more rigorously formalizable framework, a more flexible one that can be easily integrated with other formal theorizing in first-order logic. The most direct way to do this is by having objects on hand for objectual quantification. With this in mind, one might introduce

¹⁹ This quasi-quantificational structure is extended through certain natural-language uses of the expressions ‘however’ and ‘howsoever’. These existing expressions do not have quite the same range of applicability or flexibility as Prior’s neologisms, which include a general-purpose sentential variable in ‘thether’ as well as quantifiers governing it.

²⁰ Williams’s (1976) version of Prior’s approach read the sentential variables and quantifiers as explicitly substitutional. For worries about substitutional quantification, see Horwich (1998, pp. 25-6). Prior himself seems to have treated his adverbial quantifiers as *sui generis*.

propositions as objects that get presented when we assert. However, once we have introduced propositions, we should recognize that we can distinguish a variety of ways of presenting them, which can indicate different types of speech-acts.²¹ We can capture the “as factual” aspect of asserting in this framework by saying, “When we assert a proposition, we present that proposition *as true*”. The question is whether a Deflationist can do all of this and reap the benefits of replacing quasi-quantification over adverbially specified presentations of the world with objectual quantification that can be regimented within first-order logic.

We contend that a Deflationist can do this. Indeed, this is where Deflationary talk of the truth-predicate being “merely a formal device” has bearing. We can think of bringing in the framework of propositions as implementing a form of semantic ascent, from talk about the world and how it is being presented, to talk of these objects, posited as entities that specify the world as being somehow. And a Deflationist can claim that the introduction of truth-talk here, to mark a unique consequence of asserting in propositional terms, just involves a use of ‘true’ that points to its core logical function of semantic descent, to undoing the semantic ascent implemented by introducing objects over which we can quantify, and returning our focus to the world.

We can see a suggestion of this understanding in Prior’s views. In his adverbial sentential-variables account of truth-talk, Prior (1971, p. 21) followed Ramsey’s extended redundancy theory in maintaining generally that no instance of truth-talk is really about any

²¹ Notice that not all speech-acts are easily framed in propositional terms: One cannot inquire or question *that p* but only *whether p*, which seems to reinstate the adverbialism we are trying to reify our way out of. It is not clear that these speech-acts are best understood as applying an illocutionary force to a proposition. Even worse, speech-acts of accosting (“Yo, Bob!”) and demonstrating/indicating (“Lo, a rabbit!”) seem fully non-propositional. See Kukla and Lance (2009).

proposition (being instead “about whatever the proposition is about”). However, Prior still allowed that one might engage in what we can call “proposition-talk” (as we just quoted him doing), including talking “about them” being true or being false. But he (Ibid., pp. 29-30, 98) considered this kind of talk just to involve a figure of speech about logical constructs or talk of “quasi-properties of quasi-objects”, rather than being some genuinely ontologically committing form of discourse. This is the way that a Deflationist should think of the introduction of the framework of propositions, with the role of truth-talk being to “logically unconstruct” applications of that framework.

In a particular case, such as an assertion that snow is white, Deflationary strategy #1 takes the distinguishing feature of the speech-act to be its having the consequence that the speaker presents the world as being such that, in it, snow is white. In this specific case, one can semantically ascend from talk of the world being presented to talk of the proposition that snow is white being presented. But now we need to capture the distinguishing “as factual” mode of presenting that asserting yields. For a Deflationist, this amounts to incorporating the detail that one is presenting the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow. This can be accomplished by semantically descending from the object-talk of propositions introduced, back down to some adverbially specified talk of presenting the world. Since truth-talk implements semantic descent, it can transform talk of presenting the proposition that snow is white into talk of presenting the world. So, the adverbial expression, ‘as true’, recalling that this is short for ‘as *being* true’, indicates that assertion involves an adverbial modification of a presenting of the world. In this particular case, the claim, that when one asserts that snow is white, one presents the proposition that snow is white *as true*, captures the same aspect of assertion as

the claim that when one asserts that snow is white, one presents the world as being such that, in it, snow is white. Generalizing from particular cases, saying that when one asserts, one presents a proposition as true captures the same aspect of assertion in general as saying that when one asserts, one presents the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow.²²

A Deflationist can take inspiration from Prior here and claim that all that the proposition-talk and truth-locutions are doing is a form of “logical constructing” and “logical unconstructing”, or, to put it into more standard terminology, a kind of semantic ascent and semantic (re-)descent. One should not, therefore, take these ways of talking to reflect anything substantive in the world—or even in our conceptual scheme. They are formal devices that provide certain advantages in expressing something that one could, in principle, express without them, where these advantages include the fineness of grain and flexibility that comes with incorporation into the rigorous formalized framework of objectual quantification and predication in first-order logic. Specifying what is unique to the speech-act of assertion, by employing talk of propositions and enlisting a truth-predicate, is thus compatible with linguistic deflationism, where one has followed Deflationary strategy #1 and retained conceptual deflationism by endorsing Frege*’s view of assertion as *sui generis* and indefinable.

4. Deflationism and Assertion as Analyzable

²² On a kind of Quinean pragmatic naturalism regarding ontology, the added utility that we are attributing to quantifying over propositions makes doing so part of a better overall theory of the world, and thus a Deflationist following this path should take on an ontological commitment to propositions. But our Deflationist is not following Quine here. She is being more Carnapian, taking proposition-talk just as a useful linguistic framework, rather than something bringing “serious” ontological commitment with it. We return to this point later on.

Endorsing a Fregean* “assertion-first” position is not the only tack a Deflationist can take in responding to the challenge we have been considering regarding the distinguishing mark of assertion. It is also possible for a Deflationist to hold that assertion admits of an illuminating analysis, so long as she does not give the concept of truth a fundamental role in answering the what-question regarding assertion. This is the sort of analysis that Brandom (1983, 1994) develops in his work on assertion, where he explains this speech-act in terms of deontic scorekeeping and an inferential articulation in terms of the normative statuses of commitment and entitlement. This account clearly makes assertion something substantive—a unified kind of speech-act that is distinct from other kinds of speech-acts. Moreover, in his discussion of assertion, Brandom also identifies asserting with presenting as true (or “putting forward as true” or “taking-true”).

Given the substantiality of assertion on Brandom’s account, one might worry that his identification of asserting with presenting *as true* makes the concept of truth expressed by this use of ‘true’ a substantive one, which would seem to violate conceptual deflationism.²³ But, technically, this is not a violation of conceptual deflationism. Even though Brandom’s identification does mean that the phrase ‘presenting as true’ picks out something substantive, his account of assertion is offered in terms that avoid any appeal to the notion of truth. As a result, the concept of truth does not function as part of his answer to the what-question about the nature of assertion. Brandom simply uses the expression ‘true’ as part of a label for something substantive, but doing this does not render the concept of truth expressed by this use of ‘true’ incompatible with any aspect of Deflationism. In a similar fashion, Brandom (1994,

²³ Cf. Bar-On and Simmons (Ibid., pp. 82-3), for a claim like this.

p. 329) allows the use of the locution 'truth' in the expression 'truth-conditions', as a label for what one specifies in a specification of the content of a declarative utterance. But, as with assertion, he explains content *via* an independent, prior, inferentialist account that makes no use of the concept of truth. So, with respect to his accounts of both assertion and content, there is no need to take any truth-locution used in alternative labels for them as expressing a separate, explanatory concept of truth. Thus, contrary to this worry, Brandom's views do not violate conceptual deflationism.

The only potentially legitimate worry that one might have, regarding Brandom's views on assertion, is that his deflationary account of the truth-predicate does not apply to his use of the term 'true' in the phrase 'presenting as true', and that he gives no account of the latter. We grant this point, but since he provides an analysis of the concept of assertion that is free of any truth-locution, the expression 'presenting as true' is dispensable for him. His use of truth-locutions in labels for some of the aspects of language that he explains in truth-free terms could be considered just a way of relating his inferentialist approach to the orthodox representationalist approach, that is, of correlating them with one another. This could be considered a kind of merely expressive use of 'true' and would thus be compatible with linguistic deflationism.

Even if we are wrong about that, and Brandom's official views do fail to adhere to Deflationism, by violating either conceptual or linguistic deflationism, there are other strategies that Deflationists can employ, while agreeing with Brandom that assertion is substantive and analyzable. What we call "Deflationary strategy #2" accepts that assertion admits of a substantive analysis but holds that no appeal to the concept of truth is needed in providing that

account. Brandom's own account of assertion meets these criteria, but any account that does not make the truth concept perform an explanatory role in an answer to a what-question is a candidate for incorporation into strategy #2.²⁴ With such an account on hand, a Deflationist can accept that when one asserts one presents as true, again, as merely specifying a distinguishing mark of assertion.

To get a broader sense for how Deflationist strategy #2 can be applied, consider employing it with the position on assertion championed by Williamson (1996 and 2000). Williamson's answer to the what-question about the notion of assertion is that assertion is the unique speech-act governed by a "knowledge rule" to the effect that

(K-A) One must: assert that p, only if one knows that p.

He takes this speech-act to be "unique" in the sense that assertion is the only speech-act that is governed by this (K-A) rule. So, for Williamson (2000, pp. 238-66), (K-A) is "constitutive" of the speech-act of assertion and is akin to a rule of a game. He further claims that, by articulating (K-A), we describe our normal practice of assertion and that doing so is like articulating the rules for a traditional game. Breaking the rule does not result in the failure to make an assertion, but

²⁴ We will consider one such account, that of Williamson (1996, 2000), in some detail presently. For other analyses of assertion that are suitable for use in applying Deflationary strategy #2, consider the views of C.S. Peirce (per Kenneth Boyd (2016)) and John MacFarlane (2011). Both views analyze assertion in terms of commitment, as Brandom does, but they diverge from the latter by labeling one such commitment as a "commitment to truth". However, this can be rendered suitably deflationary by understanding it along the lines that William Alston (2000, p. 120) explains in his "responsibility" view. According to his view, asserting that p (by assertorically uttering some sentence S that expresses that p) is a matter of "taking responsibility for its being the case that p". While generally no friend of Deflationism, Alston explains this responsibility in terms of "subjecting [one's] utterance to a rule that, in application to this case, implies that it is permissible for [one] to utter S only if p". The appeal to truth-talk in a Peircean/MacFarlanian specification of a "commitment to truth" could be understood as just a way of incorporating the sentential variable into natural language, making those accounts of assertion (along with Alston's) available for Deflationary strategy #2. Alternatively, a Deflationist could embrace Paul Grice's (1989) understanding of assertion in terms of an intention to induce a belief in one's audience, or a different Grice-inspired view, like that of Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979), provided a truth-free account of belief is available. We discuss truth-free analyses of belief below.

it does make one liable to criticism. For Williamson, (K-A) is a norm that provides the condition on which a speaker has the authority to make an assertion. Since, as we have said, Williamson also subscribes to a knowledge-first view, his account does not bring in the truth concept in its train. He provides a substantive answer to the what-question about assertion, but without taking the truth concept to perform any explanatory role.²⁵

5. Deflationism, Platitudes, and Identifying Assertion with “Presenting as True”

Both Deflationary strategies considered thus far involve resisting an identification of asserting with presenting as true. This stands in contrast with a particular methodological view one might think should apply to theorizing about truth, specifically the view that philosophical analyses should focus on platitudes, as Crispin Wright (1992, p. 34) and Frank Jackson, Graham Oppy, and Michael Smith (1994, pp. 294-5) have emphasized. After all, among the platitudes associated with the notion of truth is that truth is correspondence with the facts, which sounds like a rather inflationary claim, metaphysically speaking. While we think that a Deflationist is unlikely to see the preservation of platitudes about truth as paramount, we think that the case for Deflationism is strengthened when its proponents can accommodate platitudes about truth and can explain their intuitiveness in a suitably deflationary manner (for example, explaining and deflating the “correspondence intuition”).

With the foregoing in mind, we introduce what we call “Deflationary strategy #3”, which accounts for the role the truth concept seems to play in explaining what assertion is, where this

²⁵ In addition, it bears noting that Williamson’s knowledge-first view does not give the truth concept an explanatory role in answering a what-question about knowledge and, so, it could not transfer up to perform an explanatory role in answering a what-question about assertion.

strategy both takes the notion of assertion to be analyzable and accepts an identification of asserting with presenting as true. This strategy might be attractive to a Deflationist who wants to accommodate platitudes about truth and who agrees with Wright's (Ibid.) claim that one of the central platitudes about truth is "that to assert is to present as true". As our discussion above indicates, one way for a Deflationist to follow strategy #3 would be by endorsing what Brandom actually says about assertion and truth-talk. However, for any Deflationist who is leary of Brandom's normative inferentialism, or who is concerned that he violates either conceptual or linguistic deflationism, there is a more neutral way to follow strategy #3. While Deflationary strategy #3 is compatible with Brandom's views on assertion and content, it does not require them.

The basis of the more neutral version of Deflationary strategy #3 involves analyzing the instance of truth-talk used to express what assertion is adverbially, in terms of how-talk, as we described in §3. On this approach, the claim that to assert is to present a proposition as true gets re-rendered as the claim that to assert is to present the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow. A result of adopting this approach, however, is that a stronger version of the fragmentation concern we considered in our discussion of Deflationary strategy #1 might seem to emerge. Above, the acknowledged fragmentary aspect of the relevant how-talk claim served to fend off any worry that a substantive truth concept (or property) was being smuggled in, and any further concerns that this would fragment assertion itself were addressed by noting that the how-talk claim expressed only a consequence of assertion. Now, however, this instance of how-talk is taken to express what assertion is. As a result, our proposal for a neutral version of strategy #3 requires an account of this claim that balances making it out as

fragmented enough to block any smuggling-in concerns, with making it out as unified enough that assertion still counts as a genuine kind of speech-act. This balancing act can be pulled off because this instance of how-talk involves an element of unity. The claim, that to assert is to present the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow, has it that, in every case of asserting, the speaker presents the same thing—the world—and does so in the same “presenting how it is” way. It is just that specifically *how* the world is presented as being will differ in each of the different cases, and these differences in what thereby gets done, again, are enough to block any sort of smuggling-in concerns. This may be a narrow position to stake out, but it is a stable, defensible one.

As we noted above, the main reason for using truth-talk (and proposition-talk) to cover what the how-talk claim expresses is that the object-and-property combination of those discourses provides expressive advantages over just sticking with how-talk.²⁶ What a Deflationist must do is explain her uses of these ways of talking as ontologically uncommitting. This resonates with Prior’s views of proposition-talk as introducing “logical constructs” or “quasi-objects” and of truth-talk as trafficking in a “quasi-property” in order to provide a surrogate for a flexible framework of adverbial quantifiers and sentential variables. But if one maintains that what truth-talk and proposition-talk together really express are these adverbial matters, which get expressed in natural language with how-talk, this raises a question: How do these ways of talking, and specifically talk that appears to be about presenting certain objects

²⁶ Cf. Yablo (1996, pp. 267-70), which points out some of the expressive advantages that quantifying over ways has in comparison to generalizing with how-talk.

as having a certain property, manage to express adverbial matters pertaining to how the world is presented?

One way to answer this question is to follow Yablo (1996, pp. 268-9, 275-9), on connecting possible-worlds-talk to a form of how-talk, and offer pretense accounts of proposition-talk and truth-talk based on Kendall Walton's (1990, 1993) uses of the idea of make-believe. Such accounts would explain the instances of truth-talk and proposition-talk as exploiting the rules of particular pretenses they invoke, in order to express certain adverbial matters indirectly, by making "as if" to express matters having to do with propositions and a truth property.²⁷ The details of the pretenses involved might also provide a further element of unity beyond what how-talk involves on its own, since the pretenses that underwrite proposition-talk and truth-talk will involve unified, pretense-bound answers to certain what-questions, like what propositions are (e.g., abstract content entities) and what truth is (e.g., some sort of correspondence relation).

Still, one might worry that if an application of Deflationary strategy #3 involves an appeal to alethic fictionalism in the way just described, this will include a substantive truth concept, which is incompatible with conceptual deflationism. This worry is based on a misunderstanding of the notion of a substantive concept and of the role that concepts can play in pretense. A concept can be considered "substantive" by being a concept *of* something substantive, but this does not mean that the concept plays a genuinely explanatory role in an explanation of anything real, which is what it would take for a concept to be substantive in the sense that is relevant here. Consider, for example, the concept of *being magical*. It seems to be

²⁷ For the kinds of accounts we have in mind, see *blinded*.

a robust notion that even plays a significant role in certain sorts of literature. But it is just made up; as a result, it never plays a genuinely explanatory role. A Deflationist who endorses an application of Deflationary strategy #3 that incorporates alethic fictionalism would say the same thing about the truth concept: It may be a concept *of* something substantive, but, if so, it is only a made-up one. Within the context of the pretense, the truth-predicate can be said to express a substantive concept, since the pretense that is the expression's home can include a substantive answer to the question of what truth is, and this concept can even be said to determine a substantive property of truth, though, again, this is only within the scope of a pretense. Thus, while the truth-predicate may be related to a substantive concept, the concept never plays an explanatory role.²⁸ The only kind of role the predicate expressing the concept ever plays is an expressive one. As a result, these aspects of the view pose no threat to either conceptual or metaphysical deflationism.

Moreover, contrary to what Brandom (1994, pp. 323-4) claims, on this fictionalist approach that we are suggesting can be incorporated into Deflationary strategy #3, one can both accept and account for the full range of truth-talk, including talk that expresses T-*inflationary*-seeming, supposedly platitudinous slogans about truth, such as "Truth is a relational property" or "Truth is correspondence with the facts", thereby also accounting for

²⁸ One might contrast this line of thought with a point that Price (2003) makes as part of his rather different alethic fictionalism, namely, that there can be a real, substantive norm that speakers apply to their linguistic practices that is understood in terms of a truth property determined by a truth concept. The latter two he understands in terms of an alethic fictionalism and thus as just made up by us. The norm based on them is also just made up by us, but, given the nature of norms, that does not make it any less real or substantive. Price then uses the role that the truth concept allegedly plays in generating this norm, which he takes to be constitutive of assertion, and as grounds for rejecting Deflationism. He does this despite the metaphysical deflationism that stems from his alethic fictionalism, since he (Ibid., p. 171) rejects linguistic deflationism on the basis of rejecting conceptual deflationism. We critically address Price's objections to Deflationism in *blinded*.

the “correspondence intuition” that poses a challenge for some Deflationists. This is, again, because this approach takes every use of every truth-locution to invoke pretense. The claims just considered do not employ the truth-*predicate*, so they do not exploit its expressive role of implementing semantic descent. Instead, these claims employ the noun ‘truth’, which has its own expressive role in these cases, namely to indicate “background” or “framework” pretenses that are stipulated in the game of make-believe that is the expression’s home.

A Deflationist who understands her account in terms of alethic fictionalism in this way can say something similar about the supposed platitude, “To assert is to present as true.” On this approach, platitudes about truth are platitudinous because they express background pretenses that are stipulated for the make-believe that underwrites truth-talk. The particular pretenses put on display in the claim that to assert is to present a proposition as true are in addition to the stipulated background pretenses that are essential features of the make-believe, e.g., the pretense that there is a property of truth or that there are propositions. But sometimes including certain additional background pretenses is motivated by intuitions we have about related matters beyond the central framework-content of the make-believe, or the props it employs, or the connections between the uses of those props in the game and conditions in the world outside of the game. These intuitions can be incorporated into the make-believe as framework pretenses, and making “content-oriented” (as opposed to “prop-oriented” or “world-oriented”)²⁹ pretense-framework claims that express this (i.e., whose immediate real-world content is just that these pretenses are part of the framework of the

²⁹ The distinction between content-oriented make-believe and prop-oriented make-believe is introduced in Walton (1993). Extending this, Yablo (2005, pp. 98-9) discusses “world-oriented” make-believe as being indirectly about potentially more than just the props for the game.

make-believe) further serves to convey (even more indirectly) the intuitions that motivate including those pretenses in the make-believe.

In the case of assertion, one relevant intuition of this sort seems to be that asserting is a genuine kind of activity that we engage in, something substantive and unified. Describing what assertion is with the pretense-involving claim “To assert is to present a proposition as (being) true” employs unified notions of truth and proposition, thereby describing assertion (within a pretense) in a substantive and unified way. Assertion is not *really* presenting a proposition as true, on this view, since (on this view) there are no propositions and no property of being true outside of the pretense. But putting this claim into the make-believe as a background pretense conveys the intuition that assertion is a substantive, unified kind of activity, even beyond the unity that the how-talk claim, that to assert is to present the world as being such that, in it, things are somehow, expresses on its own. This is how incorporating pretense-based accounts of truth-talk and proposition-talk into an application of Deflationary strategy #3 adds a further element of unity to the notion of assertion when assertion is identified with presenting (a proposition) as true.

To illustrate this point, consider an analysis of Olivia asserting that birds are dinosaurs in terms of Olivia presenting the proposition that birds are dinosaurs as true. The present approach takes the rules of the pretenses that proposition-talk and truth-talk invoke to make this analysis an indirect (but more flexible and expressive) way of expressing that Olivia presented the world as being such that, in it, birds are dinosaurs. But while the latter, adverbial claim might be considered a direct way of expressing the real-world content that the pretense-involving “assertion analysis” expresses indirectly, it need not be taken to express everything

that is conveyed by the pretense-involving claim. The latter being “at home” in pretenses that include a background pretense, that to assert is to present a proposition as true, conveys the additional thought that assertion is a substantive, unified kind of activity. This intuition could turn out to be mistaken (as has been claimed, e.g., by Stephen Stich (1983), about the intuition that human cognition involves beliefs), which is why platitudes should not be taken as sacrosanct in philosophical analysis (*contra* platitude-respecting minimalism). But since we are explaining platitudes about truth in terms of pretense-framework claims about the make-believe that underwrites truth-talk, it is possible for these to be given up or changed, since they are “additional” rather than essential for the make-believe. As a result, this way of understanding Deflationism accommodates (provisionally) platitudes about truth, including the assertion platitude, and explains why they are considered platitudes, all in a suitably deflationary manner.

6. Deflationism and Other Challenges to Conceptual Deflationism

Having provided three strategies that Deflationists can employ in responding to Bar-On and Simmons’s challenge to conceptual deflationism, we now show how these strategies are available for dealing with other challenges that arise from the role the truth concept seems to play in accounts of other philosophically important concepts.

Consider, for example, an account of belief as taking a proposition to be true with the aim of doing so only if it is true. (Cf. Velleman (2000, p. 250)) To avoid violating conceptual deflationism in virtue of this platitudinous seeming claim about belief, one might follow Deflationary strategy #1 and adopt a “belief-first” position on analogy with Williamson’s

knowledge-first view, or with the assertion-first view that we have attributed to Frege, taking belief to be *sui generis* and indefinable.³⁰ The appeal to the notion of truth typically employed in describing belief could then be taken as indicating a distinctive mark of belief, rather than as providing an analysis of its nature. The use of truth-talk in specifying this mark might then be understood as implementing a surrogate for sentential variables and quantifiers, something adverbial that could also be more directly, albeit more crudely, expressed in natural language *via* how-talk. Thus, a Deflationist applying this strategy might claim that when one believes something one takes the world to be somehow, with the aim of doing so only if how one is taking the world to be is how the world actually is.

Alternatively, one might follow Deflationary strategy #2 and take belief to be analyzable without any appeal to the truth concept with the distinctive mark of belief that is typically stated in terms of truth getting read adverbially once again. For the required alternative analysis of belief, one might take inspiration from Brandom's work and offer an account of believing that parallels his truth-free account of asserting.³¹ Another option for someone following strategy #2 is to embrace a functionalist-style account of belief in terms of an internal state's role in response to sensory inputs (as well as other internal states) and in the generation of action, provided the account of any representational element does not involve the truth concept. (Cf. Field (1978), for this sort of account.) Finally, one could follow Deflationary

³⁰ While a belief-first approach might well garner pushback from philosophers of psychology and cognitive scientists, it is not completely without precedent. One might, for example, take Frege's (1879, p. 82) claims about judgment being *sui generis* as inspiration for a belief-first position. Alternatively, one might find inspiration in the views of George Bealer (1998, 2002) and Joel Pust (2000), according to which *intuition* is a *sui generis* mental state.

³¹ Brandom (1994, pp. 157-9, 195-6) actually proposes the stronger move of eliminating talk of belief and replacing it with talk of an inferentially articulated notion of doxastic commitment, which is the type of commitment characteristic of assertion.

strategy #3, identifying believing with what the truth-involving description expresses (understood in terms of the adverbial re-rendering into how-talk), and potentially bringing in pretense accounts of both proposition-talk and truth-talk. The latter would explain how those ways of talking end up expressing what the relevant how-talk claim expresses, but, again, with greater flexibility, and, as in the case of assertion, they could further help to fend off fragmentation worries.

Next, consider how a Deflationist might address the traditional account of knowledge in terms of justified true belief (plus some post-Gettier fourth condition). In this case there is already a well-developed basis for a Deflationist who wants to apply strategy #1 to avoid violating conceptual deflationism, namely Williamson's (2000) knowledge-first program. A Deflationist could endorse a knowledge-first view and then take the truth-involving description as just indicating distinguishing marks of knowing. The truth-involving specifications of these marks could also be re-expressed (reversing their order) adverbially, *via* the claim that when one has knowledge, one takes the world to be somehow, how one is taking the world to be is how it is, and the reasons one has for taking the world to be how one is taking it are such that they are conducive to taking the world to be somehow only when that is how it is.

For an application of Deflationary strategy #2 to knowledge, what is required is an analysis that does not give the truth concept an explanatory role in an answer to the what-question regarding knowledge. To this end, a Deflationist might be able to co-opt certain ideas from C.S. Peirce as the basis for an analysis of knowledge. Peirce (1877) presented a non-representational/dispositional account of belief in terms of "habits of action", and he (1878) explained truth in terms of being something the community of inquirers would believe at "the

end of inquiry” (with reality being determined by those beliefs). Combining these ideas (and assuming that the end of inquiry covers justification and, if needed, any additional post-Gettier condition), one could then analyze knowledge in terms of habits of action that would be shared by rational inquirers at the end of inquiry. What it is for someone to know something now is for her to have such a habit of action and to have developed it on the basis of a sufficient amount of inquiry (her own or someone else’s).

A Deflationist could reject the T-inflationary Peircean account of truth and instead take the truth-talk associated with the concept of knowledge (understood as above in terms of how-talk) as just a means for specifying a distinguishing mark of knowing. Alternatively, if one wants to avoid Peirce’s anti-realist, “ultimate consensus” understanding of reality, one might appeal to Joseph Tolliver’s (1989) truth-free account of knowledge in applying Deflationary strategy #2. Tolliver (*Ibid.*, pp. 40-5) explains cognitive states non-propositionally, in terms of proper functioning with respect to different roles in the control of behavior, and he analyzes knowledge states in terms of a belief matching a state of affairs that both causes it and is treated as positively relevant to the belief’s role in controlling behavior, the match being with respect to the amount of information each contains regarding the state of affairs obtaining. Since Tolliver (*Ibid.*, pp. 40-1) explains something’s containing information regarding something as a matter of the nomological/causal effect of the former on the probability of the latter, he (*Ibid.*, p. 45) claims that his view does not require the attribution of any semantic properties to account for knowledge states. Tolliver (*Ibid.*, p. 48) also argues that, while his approach is compatible with a truth requirement for knowledge, this could be met by a Deflationary

understanding of truth-talk. Thus, his account also appears to be available to someone who wants to apply Deflationary strategy #2 to knowledge.

A Deflationist who thinks that knowledge admits of an analysis and who (perhaps in virtue of embracing certain platitudes) accepts the usual truth-involving claims as part of an answer to the what-question regarding knowledge will want to apply Deflationary strategy #3, understanding the truth-claims to express just what the how-talk re-rendering of them expresses. However, as we have seen, truth-talk provides a tidier and more flexible means for expressing what the how-talk claims express, so there is motivation for bringing in the notions of truth and proposition to express this. A Deflationist might stop here, but, once again, the gap between the surface appearances of the truth- and proposition-talk and what the how-talk claims express is neatly bridged by a pretense-based analysis, here of talk of justified true belief (plus some post-Gettier fourth condition). Understanding the truth- and proposition-involving claims in this way might also allow their use to express additional unity regarding the concept of knowledge, by conveying further intuitions about knowledge's unity. As in the cases of applying this strategy in accounting for assertion and belief, the use of both truth-talk and proposition-talk in this sort of what-explanation for knowledge does not indicate that any substantive explanatory role is played by the concepts of truth or of proposition. So, it appears that all three strategies provide suitable answers to the question of how Deflationists might address the traditional account of knowledge.

Another central concept that the truth concept might appear to play a central role in explicating is that of logical validity. As we all learned in logic class, an argument is valid if and only if the truth of its premises guarantees the truth of its conclusion. Alternatively, one can

follow Alfred Tarski (1941) and maintain that a zero-premise argument (i.e., a statement), A, is valid if and only if A is true under all reinterpretations of its non-logical constituents. Either option would explain validity in terms of truth, which would seem to be in tension with conceptual deflationism. However, all three of the Deflationary strategies that we have presented can also be applied to solve the problem that the classical accounts of validity appear to present for conceptual deflationism.

As a basis for strategy #1, a Deflationist could follow Jeffrey Ketland (2012) and adopt a “validity-first” proposal, by analogy with knowledge-first and assertion-first approaches. Ketland’s leading idea is to endorse a primitive-validity view that would be an analog to Frege on assertion and to Williamson on knowledge. As Ketland (*Ibid.*, p. 421) notes, this view endorses “*validity* as a primitive notion rather than one defined in some standard manner”. (italics original) More specifically, the idea is to treat ‘x is valid’ as a primitive unary predicate.³² If successful, this would enable a Deflationist to make use of the concept of validity without compromising her conceptual deflationism, taking the truth-involving claims associated with validity, again, as indicating a distinguishing mark of an argument having this feature. A Deflationist can then say that what is expressed by a claim like ‘When an argument is logically valid, it follows that if all of its premises were true, then the conclusion would have to be true’ is just that when an argument is logically valid, it follows that if the world were how all of the premises together present it as being, then it would also have to be how the conclusion presents it as being. Or, in Tarkian terms, if A is logically valid, then how A presents the world as being is how it actually is under all reinterpretations of A’s non-logical constituents. Logical

³² Field (2015) has also argued that validity should be taken as a primitive notion.

entailment/consequence would then be explained as the relation between the premises and conclusion of a logically valid argument, and an argument's soundness would be a matter of it being logically valid with the world actually being how the premises present it as being.

Deflationary strategy #2 can also be applied in the case of logical validity. This approach requires an appeal to a truth-free analysis of logical validity, and one can turn to Brandom for such an account. He (1994, pp. 104-7, 114-5) explains logical validity in terms of a prior notion of good material inference, where this is explained in terms of incompatibilities among the *sui generis* normative statuses of commitment and entitlement. (Ibid., p. 115) The account of logical or formal validity then proceeds in a way that parallels Tarski's account, so that an argument A (involving an inference from premises to conclusion) is logically valid if and only if A involves a good material inference and every reinterpretation of A's non-logical constituents (that is, any substitutions for any of its non-logical vocabulary) will keep that good material inference good (i.e, no substitution for any of A's non-logical vocabulary will turn the good inference A involves into a bad one). Brandom provides the required truth-free means of specifying the logical vocabulary *via* his (Ibid., pp. 108-13) reading of Frege (1879), according to which the logical vocabulary is demarcated in terms of its role in making explicit "the inferential involvements in virtue of which nonlogical claims have the conceptual contents they do". Given this truth-free account of logical validity, a Deflationist following Deflationary strategy #2 can, once again, read the truth-involving claims typically made regarding validity as just specifying a distinguishing mark of an argument being logically valid, explaining the logical validity notion (and thus the related notions mentioned above) and how the truth concept relates to it without violating conceptual deflationism.

If a Deflationist follows Deflationary strategy #3 in giving an account of logical validity, she will take the truth-involving claims made about it to express the core of what logical validity is in general. She can then say that what is expressed by the claim, that an argument being logically valid is it being such that if all of its premises were true, then the conclusion would have to be true, is just that an argument being logically valid is it being such that if the world were how all of the premises together present it as being, then it would also have to be how the conclusion presents it as being. In Tarskian terms: Argument A being logically valid just is the world actually being how A presents it as being, and remaining so under all reinterpretations of A's non-logical constituents. It is also possible to incorporate fictionalist accounts of truth-talk and proposition-talk here, taking these ways of talking as providing a more flexible and expressive means of saying (indirectly) what the relevant how-talk claims express directly, as well as bridging the gap between what the truth-involving claims appear to be about and what the how-talk claims express and perhaps expressing further unity and substantiveness regarding the concept of validity.

We take the considerations presented *via* the examples examined in this section to illustrate how to extend our strategies to other cases where the truth concept appears to play a role in answering a what-question about some philosophically significant concept.

7. Concluding Remarks

We have provided three strategies that Deflationists can employ to respond to the alleged challenge that a substantive concept of truth is required in an explanation of the illocutionary force of assertion and have shown that these strategies can be applied to other supposed

challenges to conceptual deflationism, which involve the concepts of belief, knowledge, and validity. As we noted above, while Bar-On and Simmons (Ibid.) present their argument as an objection to conceptual deflationism, by refuting their separation thesis, we have explained how it actually seems to pose a challenge to Deflationism as a whole. Nevertheless, we have shown how, whether a Deflationist applies strategy #1, following Frege* and holding that assertion is indefinable and that “presenting as true” is merely a distinctive consequence of asserting, or she follows Brandom (or someone else) who takes assertion to be analyzable in truth-locution-free terms, and then either applies strategy #2, taking presenting as true as a distinctive consequence of assertion, or applies strategy #3, accepting an identification of presenting as true with asserting, she can still uphold conceptual deflationism, along with linguistic and metaphysical deflationism. Thus, Deflationism is safe from any particular challenge pertaining to giving an account of the illocutionary force of assertion, as well as to the other putative challenges that we have considered that supposedly arise from the truth concept’s role in accounts of the concepts of belief, knowledge, and validity. Our hope is that once Deflationists understand how our three strategies can be employed to resolve these alleged challenges to conceptual deflationism, they will see how these strategies can be used to resolve challenges that arise for other concepts that appear to put pressure on conceptual deflationism and, thus, on Deflationism as a whole.

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