

DEFLATIONISM AND THE EVALUATIVE NATURE OF TRUTH

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Introduction

What unites all deflationary theories of truth is the denial of the claim that truth is a metaphysically significant property. Most deflationists defend their position by pointing to some version of Tarski's truth schema (Tarski 1944) which is used to argue that the truth predicate can be eliminated from natural language without any loss of (important) expressive power. In this article, I pick up on John Searle's point that deflationary theories of this kind fail to adequately account for (i) the *evaluative* nature of our truth-talk and (ii) cases where we predicate "true" to things *other* than declarative sentences (Searle 1995). According to Searle, these critiques provide good reason to abandon deflationism and accept an *inflationary* correspondence theory of truth instead. I argue that while Searle's critique of classical deflationism *can* be used to build a global theory of all our truth-talk that runs counter to classical deflationism, it is insufficiently strong to force a complete abandonment of the *basic idea* of deflationism.

In part one of the paper I define classical deflationism. In part two I show how Searle's critique defeats classical deflationism. In part three I present the idea that all truth talk functions to set standards of assessment for some X. In part four, I join the assessment view of truth with parts of Searle's view to create a global deflationary theory capable of avoiding Searle's criticism of classical deflationism. The paper ends with a short conclusion.

I

There are as many deflationary views about truth as there are authors on the subject. A complete overview of the field is beyond the scope of this article. However, Horwich's description of the general theme of these theories is ac-

curate enough to provide a good starting point. According to him, deflationism about truth is

... a reaction against the natural and widespread idea that the property of truth has some sort of underlying nature and that our problem as philosophers is to say what that nature is, to analyse truth either conceptually or substantively, to specify, at least roughly, the conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be true. (Horwich 1998:239)

Most, but not all deflationary theories rely, in some way or other, on the basic idea that the truth predicate is a tool for disquotation (i.e. it allows us to move between talking about declarative sentences being true to simply asserting the content of declarative sentences). Call these theories *classical deflationism*. According to classical deflationism, disquotation can be captured by what has come to be called the equivalence schema (or E-schema):

For any declarative sentence "s", "s" is true iff s

It should be noted that philosophers disagree on whether the E-schema should apply to *propositions* or *sentences*. Both versions have virtues and vices (see Stoljar & Demnjanovic 2010 for an overview). I will focus solely on declarative sentences in this paper. The arguments I present are, however, equally applicable to propositions, doxastic attitudes and other possible truth-bearers.¹

The main point of the E-schema is to show that the predicate "true" adds no essential assertional content. In other words, there is no difference in what may be called *semantic expressive power* between the utterance "snow is white" is true" and the utterance "snow is white"; both

sides of the schema express the same proposition. Adding “is true” is simply a tool for semantic ascent: we now talk about the world by talking about a *sentence* as opposed to talking *directly* about the world.² Some, most notably Frege (1918), have taken this to show that the truth-predicate is redundant; anything substantial expressed using the predicate can be expressed without it. This view is called

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the redundancy view. Most deflationists are not quite as radical as Frege. They use the disquotational theory of truth to show how/why the truth predicate can be used to perform logical operations. Chief among these is its use as a device for expressing certain *generalisations*. The idea goes roughly as follows: an utterance like “everything Bill says is true” is a generalization of the list of all of the declarative sentences uttered by Bill. If we did not have access to the truth predicate, the only way of expressing the content of such a generalization would be to say:

Bill said “A” and A
 Bill said “B” and B
 ...etc... for all the declarative sentences uttered by Bill.

This list has a parallel in the E-schema:

“A” is true iff A
 “B” is true iff B

Thus, saying “everything Bill says is true” is simply a short hand way of saying “Bill said ‘A’ and A”; “Bill said ‘B’ and B” etc... for all declarative sentences ever uttered by Bill. The ability to perform such an operation has obvious practical significance. In fact, Horwich claims that this use of the truth predicate provides us with its *raison d'être* (Horwich 1998). On this view the truth predicate is not entirely redundant – it has important uses as a logical operator, *even though* Frege was right in saying that we can

simply assert *that X* instead of talking about the sentence “that X” as being true. In other words: The truth predicate can be important even though it lacks metaphysical substantivity.

A deflationist can hold that a complete theory of *meaning* must involve heavy-duty metaphysics, whilst denying that an account of *truth* need do so. Indeed, the main point of classical deflationism is simply this: all we need to do in order to understand the meaning of “true” is to accept the instances of the E-schema. As Horwich puts the point:

[T]he deflationist maintains that, since our commitment to these schemata accounts for everything we do with the truth predicate, we can suppose that they implicitly define it. Our brute acceptance of their instances constitutes our grasp of the notion of truth. (Horwich 1998:240)

Gupta has (correctly) argued that this “definition” is not a definition in the normal sense since it involves grasping an infinite conjunction (all the instances of the E-schema) (Gupta 1993). However, I will leave this critique aside for now. The main point that we need to keep in mind is that, according to the classical deflationist, all the instances of the E-schema together exhaustively cover the full *extension* of the meaning of the truth predicate, and can thus be taken to define it *in some sense*. Other uses of the predicate, such as forming generalisations, are parasitic upon its role in the schema. Should Horwich be right in saying that these uses are the *raison d'être* of “truth”, it is still the instances of the E-schema that define its *meaning*. I will take this as a sufficiently precise articulation of classical deflationism for the purposes of this paper (even though a proponent of the view owes Gupta a more thorough answer).³

II

In *The Construction of Social Reality*, John Searle argues against deflationism, and for a correspondence theory of truth, by claiming that truth is essentially an evaluative notion. He has the following to say about the modern philosophical literature on truth:

¹There is a lively debate in the philosophical literature on truth as to which entities are the primary truth-bearers. Entering this debate in any meaningful way would end up forcing me to dedicate at least half the paper to the issue. I have chosen, therefore, to talk only of declarative sentences as being truth-bearers. This is but a pragmatic choice. I believe that the points I make throughout this paper apply equally to all truth-bearers, be they sentences, propositions, beliefs or something else.
²I am being deliberately vague here. The purpose of the E-schema is to

show that there is some kind of equivalence relation between the left and right hand side of the instances of the schema. Exactly what this equivalence amounts to is a contested question. On the one hand, the two sides of any given instance are trivially not equivalent since one is about a sentence and the other about the world. On the other hand, the two sides are equivalent in this sense: their truth-values go hand-in-hand in all possible worlds (given that the right hand side expresses the content of the left-hand side, i.e. that ‘snow is white’ means snow is white and not Darth Vader is awesome). The equivalence relation

When truth is predicated to non-sentences it often cannot be disquoted in the way prescribed by the E-schema. But since that schema is meant to be an exhaustive definition of truth, such uses provide a direct counter-example to classical deflationism.

... very little of it is concerned with the fact that “true” and “false” are evaluative terms used to describe certain kinds of success and failure. They are used to assess success or failure of statements (and beliefs) in achieving what I call the word-(or mind)-to-world direction of fit. (Searle 1995:208)

Two things are important here. First, Searle claims that truth (and, by extension, falsity) are terms used to evaluate some sort of success/failure. This makes truth a *normative* notion. Second, Searle gives us the relevant dimension on which this success/failure is to be assessed: fit between the content of some linguistic statement or doxastic attitude and the world. This view is inflationary because “truth” is used to signify the holding of a correspondence relation between meaning and the world (a metaphysical relation if ever there was one).

In addition, Searle points out that “truth” can be used to evaluate things other than statements:

There are ... true friends (real or genuine friends), true emotions (sincerely felt, not fake), true heirs (rightful or legitimate), as well as true north, true trout (the eastern brook trout is not a true trout; it is a char), knives that cut true, and true believers. (Searle 1995:210).

On the Searlean account, truth talk is used to signify, roughly, that something X has conformed to some relevant standard Y. The role of the truth-predicate is to help *set the relevant standard*. This can be generalised into the following form:

X is a true Y

When applied to the instances of the E-schema X is understood as being a mentioned (not used) declarative sentence with representational content and Y is replaced with “declarative sentence”. The joint term “true declara-

tive sentence” is then understood as setting a standard of assessment for X, the content of which is a word-world direction of fit. However, in other kinds of truth talk X could be something like a person, and Y something like “a friend”, in which case “true Y” must be understood as indicating some relevant *standard of friendship*.

What we have here is a two-front attack on classical deflationism. On the one hand, Searle is saying that truth *as applied to declarative sentences* is more than a tool for disquotation – it is a term used to evaluate whether the relevant sentences have succeeded in achieving a word-world fit. Call this the *inflationary critique*. On the other hand, Searle is also saying that the instances of the E-schema leave out many important uses of the truth-predicate (such as when it is applied to friends, knives and heirs), and, thus, cannot be used as a definition of truth. Call this *the expanded E-schema critique*. Both of these attacks present serious problems for classical deflationism.

I agree with Searle that the E-schema critique shows that deflationists cannot rely purely on the E-schema in their definition of truth. Here is why: When truth is predicated to non-sentences it often cannot be disquoted in the way prescribed by the E-schema. But since that schema is meant to be an exhaustive definition of truth, such uses provide a direct counter-example to classical deflationism. To see this, all we need to do is to plug in one of the above uses of “true” that Searle pointed to in a declarative sentence and attempt disquotation. If deflationism is correct, we should be able to define the meaning of the word “true” in such sentences by just looking at its use in the schema. Consider the statement “Terry is a true friend”, for which the E-schema yields the following:

(2) “Terry is a true friend” is true iff Terry is a true friend

While the *sentence* “Terry is a true friend” can be disquoted, the disquotation does not eliminate all truth talk from

is therefore best understood, I think, as a material bi-conditional. However, I will not enter into this debate here. I take the basic idea of the E-schema to be intuitive enough to work with.

³Some philosophers have argued that the truth predicate mainly functions as a presentence. A presentence is a stand in for something previously mentioned, allowing one to talk of such things without having to mention them again. In the sentence ‘Greg opened the windows, he liked having them open’ the word ‘he’ functions as a presentence by referring back to ‘Greg’. In a similar way, truth can be used to agree

with previously uttered declarative sentence without having to repeat it. A person may say ‘grass is green’ and I may answer ‘true’, rather than repeating ‘grass is green’. Presentential theories point to some very practical uses of the truth predicate missed by classical deflationism, but because of lack of space I will focus purely on arguing against the latter. I do think, however, that the theory I end up sketching is compatible with the truth predicate sometimes functioning as a presentence, but that will be a topic for another time. For more on Presentential theories of truth, see Dorothy L. Grover et. al. (1975).

the right hand side of the schema. The word “true” here must carry some meaning that cannot be defined by simply pointing to the instances of the E-schema (since the predicate figures in the meaning of the declarative sentence even after disquotation). Another way of putting the same point is this: If the *raison d’être* of the truth-predicate is its use as a tool for generalizations (as Horwich claims), and it functions as such a tool because it is exhaustively defined by the instances of the E-schema, then its use in expressions like “true friend” *must* be derived from the E-schema. However, because it is impossible to understand what a true friend is by just looking at the schema, truth must have uses beyond constructing generalisations and must carry some meaning that cannot be defined by the conjunction of all the instances of the E-schema – which in turn constitutes a refutation of classical deflationism.

One way in which deflationists can attempt to avoid this criticism is by providing a more elaborate method of disquotation. The most promising method for achieving this is to claim that being a true friend simply means being *a friend*. We could then translate “Terry is a true friend” into “it is true that Terry is a friend”, or “‘Terry is a friend’ is true”, which in turn would yield the normal disquotational results. This two-tiered disquotation would look as follows:

- (3) “Terry is a true friend” can be translated into: “‘Terry is a friend’ is true”
 (4) “Terry is a friend” is true iff Terry is a friend

The problem with this suggestion is that one *cannot* translate “Terry is a true friend” into “it is true that Terry is a friend” because the two are not meaning-equivalent. A true friend is someone who is an *exceptional friend*. If a scale was devised on which to measure friends, it would go from something like a *friendly acquaintance* (which is a fancy way of saying “barely a friend”, or “weak friend”) to a *true friend* (meaning a *strong* or *real* friend). The word “true” in “true friend” denotes the *strength* by which the friend is a friend. This, I dare say, is an uncontroversial understanding of the meaning of “true friend”, the important consequence of which is that not all friends are true friends. To make this point more vivid we can replace

“Terry” in (3) with a free variable and get:

- (5) “X is a true friend” can be translated into: “X is a friend” is true.

Now, if we have two friends, A and B, and A is a true friend, whilst B is a *normal* friend, then the left hand side of (5), “X is a true friend”, can be true only of A, whilst the right hand side, “‘X is a friend’ is true”, can be true of *both* A and B. This breaks the transitivity of the translation and shows that removing “true” from “true friend” changes the meaning of the expression.⁴

I can imagine two deflationist answers to the problems just explicated: (i) to deny the analysis of “true friend” I gave and maintain that it *really means* “friend”, or (ii) to restrict one’s theory of truth to cover only truth talk specifically about declarative sentences. Such a *local deflationist* would claim that any use of the truth predicate outside the specified domain has no bearing on what deflationary theories are meant to explain. Because I remain convinced that my understanding of the meaning of “true friend” is not misguided (until proven otherwise), I will focus my attention on (ii).

Embracing local deflationism amounts to saying that the truth-talk that traditional deflationists are concerned with is restricted to truth-talk about declarative sentences and beliefs (or whichever truth-bearer one prefers) and does not include talk about friends, knives and heirs. This limits standard deflationism to saying that the truth-predicate *as applied to declarative sentences* is defined by the instances of the E-schema, whilst leaving open (and ignoring) the possibility that we might use the word “true” in other circumstances as well.

I don’t think local deflationism is a promising theory. The main problem is that it requires that we think of all truth-talk as being neatly divisible into two distinct categories, neither of which has *anything* to do with the other. Classical deflationism, after all, is the thesis that the truth predicate is *entirely* defined by the E-schema: any use of “true” which cannot be understood by looking at the instances of said schema would tarnish the definition. Therefore, in order for classical deflationism to hold, any

⁴It is worth noting that I don’t think that all of the examples brought up by Searle are like the true friend case. The sentence ‘that bird is a true trout’ *can*, I think, be translated into ‘that bird is a trout’ is true. This, however, does not block the general argument I am constructing. It is enough for me that there are *some* expressions involving the truth predicate that cannot be translated in this way.

⁵Some might feel sceptical about this point. They might feel like it is, somehow, possible for true** -uses to be derivative of true* -uses. But this is not possible. If truth is *exhaustively* defined by the instances of the E-schema, then sentences like “X is a true friend” become ungrammatical and senseless. Indeed, I find it impossible to even imagine how true* could inspire *the creation* of a true** concept. For what would it mean to say that

such uses *must be completely separated from the instances of the E-schema*. This means that, according to local deflationism, the “true” in “S is true” must be *a different predicate* than the “true” in “X is a true friend”. To keep these two predicates apart, we can call the former “true*” and the latter “true**”.⁵

At this point, the following question must be raised: why are we using the same word, “true”, to express both true* and true** if they are completely different predicates? Of course, it is not *logically* impossible that us doing so is simply the result of random linguistic/historical coincidences - but that seems a very shaky presupposition upon which to rest basic explanations about our truth-talk. The suspiciousness of this idea grows even stronger from Searle’s observation that all our different uses of “true” “show family resemblance”. This resemblance he traces to the etymological root of the word, which is the Indo-European word “deru” for “tree”, implying *trustworthiness* and *reliability* (Searle 1995, p.210). Searle uses this observation to argue that “true” simply means something like “trustworthy” and that declarative sentences are trustworthy when they successfully do what they were intended to do, namely to represent the world veridically (and that friends are true friends when they are trustworthy friends). This understanding of “true” removes the need for dividing up the concept into true* and true** by giving an analysis of truth that can be applied to all our uses of the predicate.

Further support for Searle’s line of argument comes from the fact that more languages than English use one single word to express both of these supposedly separate concepts. Just as there are *true sentences* and *true friends* in English, there are *wahre Sätze* and *wahre Freunde* in German and *sanna meningar* and *sanna vänner* in Swedish (to take two examples). The chances of random historical contingencies being the main villain behind the failure of natural language to draw a clear true*/true** distinction shrinks towards the infinitesimal with each language that displays this pattern. It is much more likely that English (and other languages) fail to distinguish between truth* and truth** *because there is no important distinction to be made*. In other words: *all of our truth talk is related*.

“X is a true friend” if “true” is *nothing but a tool for disquotation*? That the friend has something in common with such a logical tool? That he can be used for semantic ascent? What does this have to do with the colloquial understanding of ‘true friend’ as meaning ‘real/strong friend’? I will not try to make sense of this. It is a problem for the proponent of local deflationism, not its critics. I take it to be obvious that a local deflationist

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Both the family-resemblance argument and the argument from many languages indicate that a proper theory of truth must, contrary to the edicts of local deflationism, give a *unitary* account of all our uses of the truth predicate. Call such a theory a *global* theory of truth. In the rest of the paper, I sketch such a theory.

III

I suggest that the construction of a global theory of truth has to begin with the observation that in all truth-talk, truth functions to help *set a standard of assessment*. This view is related to Searle’s evaluative theory, but differs in important ways that will become clear as we move on. We can capture the core idea by using the following (rough) schema (call it *the assessment schema* or *A-schema*)⁶:

- (6) In sentences of the form “x is a true y” the joint term “true y” sets a standard of assessment for x.

What the A-schema allows us to do is to perform a translation of sentences such as “Terry is a true friend” into sentences without the truth predicate as long as we supplement the schema with the relevant standard of assessment. We can illustrate this idea by plugging the earlier sentence about Terry into the A-schema:

- (7) In the sentence “Terry is a true friend” the relevant standard of assessment against which Terry is measured is the standard set by the joint term “true friend”.

By supplementing this instance of the schema with an analysis of “true friend”, we can eliminate all truth-talk without losing any assertional content. Let us, for the sake of argument, say that the expression “true friend” is universally understood to denote someone who treats his friends with great respect. We can then form the following quasi-disquotation:

has to argue that true and true** are completely different and semantically unrelated concepts.*

⁶I am not suggesting that this schema should play the same kind of definitional role that the E-schema plays in classical deflationism. I am simply using the A-schema as a pedagogical tool for making some important philosophical points.

(8) “Terry is a true friend” is true iff Terry treats all his friends with great respect

Now, strictly speaking, this isn’t normal disquotation (hence “quasi”). The right hand side is not the left hand side without “is true” and quotation marks. However, it is disquotation in the sense that the left and right hand side are *meaning equivalent*. Saying “‘Terry is a true friend’ is

On the view that I have been constructing here the only difference between truth talk about declarative sentences and truth talk about friends (that is, between the local deflationist’s “true*” and “true”) is that in the former case the relevant standard of assessment is explicitly named by the X-term in the A-schema. This fact about declarative sentences gives the E-schema its classical form.**

true” has the same assertional content as saying that Terry treats all his friends with great respect. Also, the left hand side is still an example of semantic ascent (because it speaks about the world via speaking about sentences). Hence, by understanding “true” as functioning simply to set a standard of assessment and by supplying that standard on a case-by-case basis, we can do away with truth talk even when we predicate “true” to non-sentences.

But what about truth talk about declarative sentences? If the above understanding of truth talk is to unite what the local deflationist divided up into true* and true**-talk, then we have to give an account of how it applies to instances of the E-schema (i.e. to true*-talk). Let us start by plugging the sentence “‘snow is white’ is true” into the A-schema:

(9) In the sentence “‘snow is white’ is true” the relevant standard of assessment against which to measure “snow is white” is the standard set by the joint term “true ...”.

This looks very awkward. When predicating truth to declarative sentences there is no term that can fill the role of

the Y-variable. However, this awkwardness can be remedied by making a slight modification of the original sentence. Instead of “‘snow is white’ is true”, we can use the form “‘snow is white’ is a true declarative sentence” (which means the same thing). We then get:

(10) In the sentence “‘snow is white’ is a true declarative sentence” the relevant standard of assessment against which to measure “snow is white” is the standard set by the joint term “true declarative sentence”.

This looks better. Now, of course, as with “true friend”, in order to preform (quasi-) disquotation, we need to supplement this instance of the A-schema with an analysis of the relevant standard of assessment (in this case the standard set by the joint term “true declarative sentence”). It is here that the difference between the instances of the E-schema and other kinds of truth talk becomes apparent. For the nature of declarative sentences is such that they set their own standards of assessment by virtue of their content. The standard just *is* what is named by the declarative sentence itself. Thus we get:

(11) In the sentence “‘s’ is a true declarative sentence” the relevant standard set by “true declarative sentence” is the one named by “s”.

We then get:

(12) “s” is a true declarative sentence iff s

Which can be translated into:

(13) “s” is true iff s

We have now come full circle back to the normal E-schema. Note, however, that on the view that I have been constructing here the only difference between truth talk about declarative sentences and truth talk about friends (that is, between the local deflationist’s “true*” and “true**”) is that in the former case the relevant standard of assessment is explicitly *named* by the X-term in the A-schema. *This fact about declarative sentences gives the E-schema its classical form.*⁷ In truth talk about friends, the relevant standard of assessment is *not* named by the X-term, and so must be given in a supplemental analysis. Thus, the dif-

⁷This point generalizes to all mental/linguistic representations; they all constitutively set conditions of satisfaction relative to an interpretation.

⁸This (in)famous sentence comes, of course, from Richard Rorty (1979).

ference between true*-uses and true**-uses do not stem from a difference in the meaning of the truth-predicate, but from a difference in the Y-term of the A-schema. If the Y-term is “declarative sentence”, then the X-term sets its own standard of assessment, whereas if the Y-term is understood as something *other* than a declarative sentence, the standard of assessment against which X is measured is *not* given explicitly by the X-term itself, but requires a supplemental analysis. This all gives us the *illusion* of there being something special going on with the truth predicate in the E-schema, whereas, in reality, it functions in the same way in *all* cases: it helps specify a standard against which X is to be assessed. This understanding of truth-talk succeeds where classical deflationism failed: It promises to successfully explain *all* our truth talk, not *just* the truth talk included in the E-schema.

IV

We should note just how *fragile* the above analysis is. For although it is true that, in one sense, declarative sentences implicitly carry their own standards of assessment, they only do so given certain pragmatic contexts. Consider the following example:

(14) “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with” is a true declarative sentence⁸

Now, there are (at least) two ways of analysing what the truth-talk amounts to in (14). On a straight-forward reading, we can simply plug it into the E-schema:

(15) “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with” is true iff truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with

On this reading, the relevant standard of assessment is expressed by the left hand sentence itself, just as with any instance of the E-schema. On other readings, however, the standard of assessment needs to be given in a supplemental analysis. For instance, (14) might be interpreted as being a statement about the aesthetic value of Rorty’s sentence; it might be a true declarative sentence in the sense of being an *extraordinarily beautiful and well-composed declarative sentence*. On this understanding, the best we can do is the kind of quasi-disquotation that we applied to “true friend” earlier:

(16) “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with” is a true declarative sentence iff it is an extraordinarily beautiful and well-composed declarative sentence.

Whether we by “true declarative sentence” mean the standards of assessment given in (15) or (16) depends entirely on the context and intentions of the utterer. For instance, if the sentence is uttered by a teacher who is trying to teach someone how to write beautiful English, then (16) is a better interpretation. If, on the other hand, someone is trying to lecture about the nature of truth, (15) is a better interpretation. Thus, even as applied to declarative sentences, our use of the truth predicate sometime fall outside of the E-schema. The instances of that schema only accurately describe our truth talk *when the relevant standard of assessment is the one named by the sentence itself*. In order to know whether any specific use of truth falls under that description, we have to understand the context in which the truth talk takes place. This can only be done by interpreting the intentions of the utterer in the rough and tumble of the language game in which sentences are always imbedded.

So what are we left with? If what I have said so far is correct, all of our truth-talk is related because wherever the predicate is used it is used to help set *some* standard of assessment for an entity X. This, however, is a very vague and dissatisfactory theory. We want also to know what all these *truth-standards* have in common – why we keep using the word “true” in all these different contexts and not a host of *different* concepts. As I noted earlier, Searle’s answer to this question is to say that all truth talk is, somehow, talk about *reliability* or *trustworthiness*. On this view, what “X is a true friend” and “X is a true declarative sentence” have in common is that, in both cases, X is a *reliable Y*. We can formulate this Serlean analysis as follows:

(17) X is a true Y iff X is a reliable Y

Now, with this in the back of our minds, my suggestion for a global theory of truth-talk looks as follows: by combining the assessment view (the idea that all truth talk sets standards for assessment) and the Searlean reliability-view above, we get a theory which says that *all truth talk helps set standards of assessment for an X being a reliable Y*. Call this *the Evaluative Assessment view*. This view allows us to formulate a modified version of the A-schema:

(18) A-schema*: In sentences of the form “X is a true Y” the joint term “true Y” sets a relevant standard of assessment for X being a reliable Y.

As applied to the instances of the E-schema, this view entails that truth talk about declarative sentences functions

to specify the conditions under which such sentences are reliable – where those conditions are always the ones specified by the declarative sentence itself (given the right linguistic context):

(19) In the sentence “‘s’ is a true declarative sentence” the joint term “true declarative sentence” sets a standard of assessment for “s” being a reliable declarative sentence.

From this, we can derive the normal E-schema as was done in (11) through (13), except we can now freely exchange “true” for “reliable” (since truth-talk has been translated into talk about reliability).

At this point I must add that, in reality, “truth” is a much vaguer notion than indicated above; a full-blown analysis of all our truth talk would show that such talk can also set standards for X having other properties than being reliable, such as X being “pure”, “beautiful”, “exceptional”, “strong”, “real” and “good”.⁹ What all of these uses have in common, however, is that they tend towards the *positive*. They are all names of properties that we intuitively take to be part of the good. What unites *all* truth-talk, then, is the fact that it is, in some sense, always about setting a standard of assessment for some entity X having a positive (in some sense of “positive”) property.¹⁰ Exactly what the property is will vary between different domains of truth-talk, but all the properties will be family-related in the sense just indicated. I will not give a further analysis of the relevant differences between domains of truth talk here. However, I will add that I agree with Searle, based on the intuitiveness of the idea and the etymological observations noted earlier, that truth talk about declarative sentences can be paraphrased in reliability/trustworthiness-talk.

Searle, of course, draws further conclusions. He thinks that declarative sentences are true – as in reliable/trustworthy – specifically *when they correspond to the facts stated by the sentence*, such that...

(20) “s” is a reliable declarative sentence iff “s” corresponds to the fact that s

What this view does is to specify that in order for “s” to be true, it must *correspond* to the fact that s. It is this specification that makes Searle’s theory inflationary (and

which constitutes his inflationary critique of classical deflationism).

However, there is nothing in my view that *forces* us to become Searlean inflationists. Indeed, it seems far-fetched to assume that anything said so far should entail that the function of *truth talk* is to denote a correspondence relation between sentences and facts. For, even if we agree with Searle that truth-talk about declarative sentences is best understood as being a way to set standards of assessment for when those sentences are reliable/trustworthy, the *holding* of those standards need not have anything to do with truth. All that truth-talk about declarative sentences does, on the view I’ve been sketching, is to say that “s” is a reliable/trustworthy declarative sentence under the conditions specified by “s” itself. Truth talk, in other words, has nothing to do with *whether* s.

I want to hammer home this point. What the Evaluative Assessment view says is this: Substantial disagreements about the world of the kind that exists between those who assert that “‘snow is white’ is true” and those who assert that “‘snow is green’ is true” has nothing to do with *truth* explicitly. Such disagreements can be fully explained and worked out without reference to that concept. The truth talk present in these cases is simply a way of fixing the correct standards of assessment for those sentences being reliable (i.e., pointing to the standards inherent in the relevant declarative sentences themselves). The more substantive issue of *whether* snow is green or white is to be understood as a question *about snow*, not *about truth*. This “substantive issue”, has to do with *the assertion* that snow is white/green and how it relates to the world. Such assertions *can* be stated using truth-talk since a true (i.e. reliable) declarative sentence is true (reliable) only when the standards of assessment specified by the sentence obtains (i.e. “snow is white” is true iff *snow is white*, and so saying the former entails the latter). However, truth talk never adds anything *essential* to assertions about the colour-properties of snow. Just as the classical deflationist pointed out, we do not need truth talk in order to assert that snow is white. Indeed, the “only” difference between classical deflationism and the Evaluative Assessment view is that the former takes the meaning of the truth-predicate to be defined by the instances of the E-schema, whereas

⁹I have already used many of these terms as “translations” of truth in this paper – such as when I analysed ‘true friend’ as meaning ‘exceptional/good/trustworthy/real friend’ and a ‘true declarative sentence’ as sometimes meaning ‘beautiful declarative sentence’. ‘Pure’ hasn’t been used so far, but can intuitively be used to translate such sentences as ‘X is a true

ice-cream’, meaning that it is *pure* ice-cream, with no added chemicals. A full blown analysis of all truth talk would reveal many more words that can be used to translate truth-talk. However, I have no intention of providing such an analysis here. I am simply trying to argue that truth talk is pluralistic and vague precisely because it can be translated in so many

the latter instead takes the E-schema to be derivative from the evaluative nature of the truth predicate combined with the nature of declarative sentences. Concerning the (non-existent) role of truth-talk in making assertions about the world, the two theories say the same thing. Thus, the Evaluative Assessment view is deflationary in the sense that it gives truth talk no essential role in making assertions about the world. It shows, contrary to what Searle thought, that one need not have a thick metaphysical theory of truth in order to embrace the idea that truth-talk is about setting certain standards of assessment.

Conclusion

I have shown that it is possible to construct a global theory of truth by taking all truth talk to be about setting a standard of assessment for an entity, where the fulfilment of that standard means that the entity has some positive property such as *being reliable*, *trustworthy* or *beautiful*. On this view, we can see that the only substantive difference between calling a friend true and calling a declarative sentence true is that in the latter case the entity in question names the relevant standards of assessment for being reliable. This view is deflationary because it gives no essential role to truth talk in making assertions about the world, meaning that it requires no thick metaphysical theory of truth to account for what we do with the predicate. Furthermore, because it abandons the idea that the E-schema exhaustively defines the truth predicate, the Evaluative Assessment view opens up for a unitary, global account of truth-talk, and avoids the problems associated with local deflationism.

It might be objected that I have not sufficiently argued for the idea that all truth talk is about setting conditions for some *X being reliable/trustworthy*, etc. This critique is largely correct; simply pointing to the etymological history of “true” is insufficient to fully ground such a substantive claim. However, the mere fact that the Evaluative Assessment view promises to unite all truth-talk under a deflationary heading makes it – at the very least – an interesting philosophical idea worthy of further development.

different ways depending on the context in which it is uttered – but also that all such talk is related because it concerns the setting of standards of assessment for *X* having some positive property.

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¹⁰I think the X-files-use of truth might provide a counter example to my general analysis: talk of ‘the truth’ and ‘the truth out there’ might have to be analysed differently from other kinds of truth-talk. I will not try to solve this issue here, but I flag its potential importance.