

Deflationism, Truth, and Desire

Jamin Asay

University of Hong Kong

asay@hku.hk

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Abstract

Deflationists about truth generally regard the contribution that ‘true’ makes to utterances to be purely logical or expressive: it exists to facilitate communication, and remedy our expressive deficiencies that are due to ignorance or finitude. This paper presents a challenge to that view by considering alethic desires. Alethic desires are desires for one’s beliefs to be true. Such desires, I argue, do not admit of any deflationarily acceptable analysis, and so challenge the deflationist’s austere view about the semantic role of ‘true’. I consider a number of deflationist proposals for analyzing alethic desires, and find them all problematic.

1. Introduction

One key component of deflationary theories of truth is that the truth predicate is, in an appropriate sense, semantically dispensable. In principle (though not in practice), anything that you can say with it you can say without it. As Paul Horwich puts the point, “the truth predicate exists solely for the sake of a logical need” (1998: 2). It is especially valuable when we want to express or otherwise engage some semantic content that we can’t refer to explicitly (‘I don’t recall what it was, but what Sophia said yesterday is true’) or is infinitely large (‘All tautologies are true’). But ‘true’ remains semantically dispensable in the sense that we require it for various expressive purposes only because of our own ignorance and finitude.

A challenge for deflationary theories of truth, then, can come in the form of a content whose expression requires the use of ‘true’ both in principle and practice. In other words, one can pose an objection to the adequacy of deflationism by providing a content whose expression employs ‘true’ in a way that goes beyond the limits of the deflationary account of how ‘true’ operates. If the use of ‘true’ is indispensable to the expression of that content—if it plays a role beyond serving the familiar “logical needs”—then it’s not the case that ‘true’ never has a semantical contribution of its own to offer. This sort of objection is pressed by Dorit Bar-On and Keith Simmons (2007), who advance the Fregean ‘To assert is to present as true’ as expressing a thought

that evades deflationary analysis.¹ I offer here a different sort of case, one by way of reflection on the interconnections between truth, desire, and belief.

Here is an example that deflationists can handle smoothly. Whatever else it is, knowledge is of the truth. Someone knows something only on the condition that it is true. Hence:

For all subjects S and propositions φ , S knows φ only if φ is true.

Knowledge and truth are connected, but not in a way that spells trouble for deflationism. For the deflationist can provide an equivalent analysis that reveals how ‘true’ here is semantically dispensable:

For all subjects S and propositions φ , S knows φ only if φ is <Snow is white> and snow is white, or φ is <Grass is green> and grass is green, or...²

The analysis here is infinite, but shows how ‘true’ appears in the original formulation in order to serve the logical need of generalizing over infinitely many instances. To make the transformation, all the deflationist needs to appeal to is the equivalence between < p > and << p > is true>, which is the foundation of their theories.³

2. Alethic desires

But now consider the following case. Phil and Sophia are historians discussing the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province. Sophia has extensively studied the earthquake and its effects, and Phil is inquiring into how many people died as a result. Sophia tells Phil that tens of thousands of people died, and Phil makes a note of it for his own research. Later, Sophia reflects on how important it is to her that she got the facts right; Phil’s research on the cultural impacts of natural disasters in East Asia is important, and she would be upset if she had inadvertently misled him. Sophia sincerely believes that tens of thousands of people died because of the quake, and desires that her belief is true, that she has formed the right opinion about the matter. If her belief weren’t

¹ See also Simmons 2006.

² Following standard convention, ‘< p >’ abbreviates ‘the proposition that p ’.

³ Of course, one may doubt whether these analyses are adequate (e.g., Gupta 1993 and David 1994). Künne, whose deflationary account I consider below, is one such doubter, and would offer a finite formulation that avoids ‘true’ by employing sentential quantification (2003). My point in this paper is that even if these infinite analyses are correct, there are other cases that deflationists cannot handle adequately.

true, if she had made a mistake in her own research, then Sophia would be upset. A paragon of epistemic virtue, Sophia desires to get things right, and had she gotten things wrong that desire would have been frustrated.

Sophia desires that her belief, the one that then led to a similar belief in Phil, is true. This is an example of what I call an *alethic desire*, a desire that is directed toward the truth of our beliefs. If Sophia's belief turns out to be false, then she has made a mistake, and presumably caused more mistakes in Phil's subsequent research. As I just did, we can straightforwardly express the content of Sophia's desire as follows:

- (1) Sophia's belief that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake is true.

The content of her desire is a simple predication of truth to a particular truth-bearer, notably a truth-bearer whose content is known and explicitly presented.⁴ She has a particular belief, and her desire is that *that belief* be true. The task of the deflationist is to give an exhaustive account of the role that 'true' plays here by relying solely on the equivalence between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$. It doesn't at first seem to be difficult. The example doesn't employ any universal generalization regarding truth, or a non-predicative use of 'true', as in the other examples I've mentioned. It should, therefore, be an easy and even paradigmatic case for deflationists. I pose my challenge by considering the approaches offered by three representative deflationary theories: a Quinean brand of disquotationalism, Horwich's minimalism, and Künne's modest deflationism.

3. Deflationist analyses

First consider a strong form of deflationism that maintains that assertions that truth-bearers are true are tantamount to assertions of the contents of those truth-bearers. Such uses of truth are what Hartry Field (1994) calls "purely disquotational", such that expressions of the form "' p ' is true' and ' p ' are cognitively equivalent.⁵ As Quine puts the view, "By calling the sentence

⁴ I presume, following Schroeder 2004, that desires have propositional content. I also presume this to be a fairly orthodox view, though it is not universal. (Wrenn 2010, for instance, construes the contents of desires as sets of preferences.). If desires have *double* propositional content, as per McDaniel and Bradley 2008, then the content in question here is what they call the *object* proposition of the desire.

⁵ Disquotationalists tend to reject propositions in favor of sentences, so the equivalence here is stated in terms of the latter.

['Snow is white'] true, we call snow white" (1970: 12). Following this model (applied now to beliefs instead of sentences), the content of Sophia's desire is expressed by:

- (2) Tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

This analysis "descends" from (1)'s predication of truth to a truth-bearer to the content of that truth-bearer by relying solely on the cognitive equivalence between ' p ' and 'S's belief that p is true'. In so doing, it aims to demonstrate that the use of 'true' in (1), my initial straightforward formulation of Sophia's desire, is completely dispensable.

This analysis, however, might be unacceptable, even by the disquotationalist's lights (e.g., Field 1994: 250). The content of Sophia's desire, as is explicit in (1), entails that she has the belief in question, whereas the pure disquotational analysis leaves this out. So a more conservative (but still 'true'-free) analysis would be:

- (3) Sophia believes that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, and tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

As Field puts the point, (2) is cognitively equivalent to (1) relative to the existence of Sophia's belief. And "To say that A is cognitively equivalent to B relative to C means that the conjunction of A and C is cognitively equivalent to the conjunction of B and C; so that as long as C is presupposed we can treat A and B as equivalent" (Field 1994: 250). Regardless of which specific proposal is ultimately adopted, for the disquotationalist contents expressed by way of 'true' are always—and by way of the truth schema alone—cognitively equivalent to some content expressible without it.

Next consider how Horwich's minimalism would approach the desire. Unlike the pure disquotationalist, the minimalist doesn't regard $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle$ is true \rangle as either identical or cognitively equivalent contents. (This enables the minimalist to maintain the possibility of believing what someone says is true, even though one doesn't know or understand what was said.) They differ exactly where they appear to differ: one involves truth, and the other doesn't. But, the minimalist is quick to add, the additional meaning provided by adding 'true' is constituted simply by our disposition to accept the equivalences between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle$ is true \rangle (Horwich 1998: 128). As for beliefs in particular, Horwich maintains that we who possess the concept of truth all accept the instances of the schema "The belief that p is true if and only if p ", and then claims 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” (1998: 121; emphasis added). The upshot is that the only difference—setting aside again the issue of truth-bearers—between a desire (or belief or other propositional attitude) of content $\langle S$'s belief that p is true \rangle and of content $\langle p \rangle$ is that the former involves having a disposition to infer between the two contents: we understand the former's appeal to ‘is true’ exhaustively by way of our acceptance of the instances of the schema ‘ S 's belief that p is true if and only if p ’. Consequently, the minimalist would offer the same analysis of Sophia's desire as would the disquotationalist, with the caveat that the analysis doesn't “mean the same thing”. The alethic desire shares its content with (2) or (3), and accompanies the disposition to infer between them and (1). So the analysis still provides the propositional component of Sophia's desire, especially given that the content of Sophia's desire is perfectly transparent: to understand the nature of a desire whose target is some truth-bearer's being true, we need rely on no more than what the truth-bearer says.

Finally, consider Künne's modest form of deflationism. Unlike Horwich, Künne believes that a general, non-infinity definition of truth can be offered by means of sentential quantification: $\forall x(x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \exists p(x = \langle p \rangle \ \& \ p))$ (2003: 337; notation adjusted). This says, in effect, that what it is for something to be true is for there to be a proposition identical to it where what that proposition says is the case. This gloss in English is suspiciously circular (‘is the case’ is a likely perfect synonym of ‘is true’), which speaks to Künne's need to explain the double quantification involved here. The universal quantification is ordinary first-order objectual quantification. The existential quantifier, Künne argues, is also an objectual quantifier—a higher-order quantifier that ranges over propositions. Moreover, it is a *sentential* quantifier in that ‘ p ’ is to be replaced by something that grammatically is a sentence, unlike the ‘ x ’ which is bound by a *nominal* quantifier and is to be replaced by something that is grammatically a name. To apply Künne's account to Sophia's belief, we need to modify it to allow truth to attach to things that *express* propositions, not just things that are propositions. We can now analyze (1) as:

- (4) There is a p such that Sophia's belief that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake expresses $\langle p \rangle$ and p .

There are many forms of deflationism, but I believe that these three adequately represent the genre. They are united in giving analyses of the truth ascription within Sophia's desire that purport to show that its role is, effectively, standing for the content of the belief that Sophia desires

to be true. In this way, they manifest the fundamental deflationist insight that the key to understanding the role of ‘true’, wherever it appears, is to look to the equivalences between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle$ is true \rangle and no further. As I shall now argue, these analyses fail to capture the content of Sophia’s desire.

4. The objection

Sophia desires that her belief is true. She is an earnest and respectable historian who takes her epistemic duties seriously. She hopes that the beliefs she forms as a result of her academic endeavors are true, and acts accordingly. It’s disheartening for her when she learns she has made mistakes in the past, but this only strengthens her resolve to continue discovering the truth about her topics of specialization, and locate and correct any errors. But Sophia is no monster. She rightly believes that the earthquake was a terrible tragedy, and has tremendous empathy for all who suffered as a result. Sophia wishes that the earthquake had never happened. In other words, in no way does Sophia desire that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. What this case shows is that one can desire that one’s belief that p is true without desiring that p .

The problem common to each of the deflationary accounts is that they all, in one way or another, replace the appeal to truth in the straightforward description of Sophia’s desire with the content of her belief. We should expect exactly that result from a deflationary analysis, since deflationists maintain that ‘true’ typically operates as a placeholder for some other content; this function is precisely what establishes its expressive utility. But this transformation presents Sophia’s morally and epistemically virtuous desire as a monstrous one. Hence, what Sophia’s desire reveals is that since we can desire that our belief that p is true without also desiring that p , ‘true’ here is not playing a strictly deflationary role.

Let me be clear about exactly what is at issue. The problem is that Sophia’s entirely virtuous alethic desire is easily identifiable using ‘true’, but the deflationary readings of ‘true’ all render Sophia’s desire monstrous. So a perfectly ordinary desire—and, importantly, a desire identified in a perfectly ordinary manner—is made invisible by the deflationist, who can’t distinguish between the alethic desire and the monstrous desire. The problem is not that Sophia’s desires are inconsistent—they surely are, on anyone’s account. Her alethic desire is satisfied only if the monstrous state of affairs that she does not desire obtains. But of course the reality of inconsistent desires is all-too-familiar to all of us. Nor am I interested in evaluating Sophia’s rationality, or

giving a general account of alethic desires or what it is, in general, to be a “lover of truth”.⁶ My concern is that although Sophia herself, her mental states, and our default descriptions of them are all perfectly intelligible, deflationists nevertheless stumble when trying to understand them. I’ll now develop the objection more thoroughly.

The objection as applied against (2) is straightforward, since it identifies Sophia’s praiseworthy alethic desire with the monstrous desire for the actual result of the disaster. Sophia adamantly does not desire (2), and so (2) is no analysis of (1). Analysis (3) is no improvement, as it still involves the offending content. Note that (3) is a conjunction, where the problematic content is only one of the conjuncts. And one might contend that desiring a conjunction doesn’t entail desiring the conjuncts (e.g., Piller 2009: 194).⁷ Perhaps so; in general, desire isn’t closed under logical entailment. If it were, Sophia herself would be impossible, since I claim that she desires that her belief that p is true but not that p . But desiring (3) is just as monstrous as desiring (2), and *neither* conjunct of (3) speaks to Sophia’s desire. Sophia’s concern is with her having fulfilled her epistemic duties, not the holding of some particular belief, let alone the content of that belief. This virtuous feature is apparent in (1), where the focus is on the belief itself, not its content. Someone who desires (3), by contrast, does not thereby manifest the epistemic virtue that accompanies Sophia’s desire. The person who desires (3) desires for the world to be a certain terrible way, and for Sophia to believe that the world is that way. That person is not Sophia. It describes instead someone like Professor Nasty, who maliciously desires for natural disasters to lead to massive suffering, and who also desires that Sophia in particular (who perhaps bested him for some academic position in a past job search) be haunted by the reality of such tragedies.

Analysis (4) is somewhat different in form, being an existential statement, but the same basic point holds. To desire (4) is effectively to desire (3), given the actual proposition that contributes to making (4) true. But even if we consider (4) in its existential form where the relevant proposition is left unsaid, it’s clear that it doesn’t capture Sophia’s alethic desire. (4) is a desire for a belief to be meaningful, and for the content of that belief to obtain. That is not what Sophia

⁶ See Wrenn 2010 for discussion related to the former, and Sosa 2001, Piller 2009, and Zagzebski 2014 for accounts of the latter.

⁷ I’m not convinced, though, by Piller’s example of complementary goods. His claim appears to be that one can have, for example, a desire with content \langle I am in possession of a car and I am in possession of fuel \rangle but without desiring \langle I am in possession of a car \rangle or \langle I am in possession of fuel \rangle . I presume the thought behind the purported counterexample is that it’s possible that one who desired the conjunction could nevertheless have no desires fulfilled were one to come to believe only one of the conjuncts. But there are other ways of understanding such cases. Perhaps the desire in question is conditional, not conjunctive. Perhaps there are desires for the conjuncts, but they are far less psychologically salient than the main desire in question, that one be able to drive the car somewhere.

desires, since her desire is directed at her epistemic duties *as such*. Once again, (4) is the sort of thing that is desired by someone like Professor Nasty.

If we don't attend to desire in particular here, we are likely to miss the failings of these analyses. After her conversation with Phil, Sophia might reflect on which beliefs she has. She believes that tens of thousands of people died in the quake, and believes that she has that belief. Analyses (2), (3), and (4) are indeed things she believes, so when focusing on *belief* we might very well think that they are at least candidate analyses of (1). But none of these analyses is the content of any *desire* of hers, so they are not good candidates after all.

I do not deny that we can express some "object-level" desires by way of semantic ascent. In a burst of melancholy, Sophia might exclaim "I wish my beliefs about this earthquake weren't true!" as a means of expressing her desire that the earthquake had never happened, or not produced so many casualties. In that case, she's not talking about her beliefs as such. And certainly the English language allows us to do that. My point is that it's not the *only* thing we might mean when we express the desire for our beliefs to be true (or not).⁸ There are also the desires that I have identified by stressing Sophia's epistemic credentials, and her concern for her doxastic well-being. Hence, one might use 'true' to get at a "ground-level" content specifically, but one can *also* use it to do something more. That something more is what is never allowed by the deflationist. What Sophia demonstrates is that it is possible to have alethic desires of a form that are not "disquotationally transparent", that are about *the truth of the belief*, and not the particular content in question at all. Because we can use (1) to express such a content, we have in (1) a use of 'true' that goes beyond deflationist strictures. It is a case that reveals that not everything we do with the truth predicate is captured by the equivalence schemas. As a result, deflationists are left without an adequate analysis of 'S's belief that *p* is true'.⁹

5. Replies

It might be objected that we shouldn't expect a content to be replaceable by its analysis within a desire context in a truth-preserving way. Even if '*p*' is analyzed by '*q*', it's not necessary that one desires that *p* if and only if one desires that *q*. One might desire to do the good, but not desire to maximize utility, even if doing the good is maximizing utility. There might, in other words,

⁸ Similarly, in certain contexts one *might* accomplish the act of calling snow white by calling 'Snow is white' true, but that doesn't mean that, in general, it's impossible to talk about the truth-values of sentences.

⁹ My argument is framed in terms of beliefs, but the objection persists regardless of which truth-bearers are employed. Sophia also desires that her statements and assertions are true, but not in the sense that she desires what they are about.

be enough of a gulf between a statement and its analysis to establish that a desire in terms of the former does not mean having a desire in terms of the latter.

In response, first note that this reply is unavailable to pure disquotationalists, since they maintain that (1) is *cognitively equivalent* to either (2) or (3). The strength of the equivalence matters when evaluating this objection, and to say that ‘*p*’ and ‘*q*’ are cognitively equivalent is to say they are replaceable in *cognitive* contexts like belief and desire. There simply isn’t enough room between analysans and analysandum here to ground a distinction between Sophia’s praiseworthy desire expressed by (1) and the monstrous desires expressed by (2), (3), and (4); there isn’t any room at all. Künne (2003: 335), for his part, explicitly endorses the cognitive equivalence between (1) and (3), so he cannot make this reply either.

The minimalist, by contrast, denies that (1) is cognitively equivalent to either (2) or (3). The ‘true’-free analyses don’t mean exactly the same thing as their truth-laden targets. But again, the difference between the two is, by design, minimal. The difference is that one involves the denominalizing disposition, and the other doesn’t. That difference doesn’t account for the vastly different characters between Sophia’s desire and the monstrous one. Consider the kind of case that motivates the minimalist denial of cognitive equivalence. Suppose Phil asks Sophia to tell him something true that he doesn’t currently believe, but in a language he doesn’t understand. Sophia responds: “*Verde es me color preferido*”. Phil now believes that what Sophia said is true, though he doesn’t believe that her favorite color is green. In believing that what Sophia said is true, Phil doxastically aligns himself with what Sophia said: whatever it is that Sophia said, he is committed to it, too. Not knowing what that particular commitment is, Phil needs a truth-laden belief to enable the alignment. And once he learns what it is that Sophia said, he will be committed to that content. The difference between the truth-laden belief Phil has and the truth-free belief he may come to have is entirely accounted for by the equivalence between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \text{Any assertion that } p \text{ is true} \rangle$. The difference between Sophia’s desire that her belief that *p* is true and a desire that *p* is far greater. In no way does the former commit her to the latter. The former is praiseworthy; the latter is damning. These facts are not accounted for by pointing to the relevant equivalence. The role that ‘true’ plays in (1) is not to invoke or somehow engage an unspecified content—Sophia, in fact, is fully aware of the content of the belief that she desires to be true—but instead to invoke an epistemic norm and responsibility.

Another objection might protest that the analyses of Sophia’s desire that I have offered all substantially miss the mark. There is something *conditional* about Sophia’s desire, something along the lines of: *given* that tens of thousands of people died in the earthquake, and *given* that she is forming a belief on the matter, Sophia desires that she believe that tens of thousands of people

died in the earthquake. There are three basic forms that a conditional account of Sophia's alethic desire might take:

- (5) If tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, then Sophia believes that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.
- (6) If Sophia believes that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, then tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.
- (7) Tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake if and only if Sophia believes that tens of thousands of people died because of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

Christian Piller (2009), for example, offers a conditional account of what it is to desire the truth along the lines of (5).¹⁰ These conditional desires are not monstrous, and some of them might capture something important about epistemic responsibility. They are therefore better candidates for capturing Sophia's desire than the above analyses.

Sophia may well have desires with contents (5), (6), or (7). Such desires may well have an important role to play in virtue epistemology. But none of them is a candidate analysis of (1). (1) entails each of (5), (6), and (7), but not vice versa. Desires with contents given by (5), (6), and (7) could be satisfied if Sophia's belief turned out to be false. But Sophia's desire is exactly such that it would go unsatisfied if her belief were false. Furthermore, whatever account is given for the content of Sophia's desire must apply to any other mental state that shares that content. Sophia desires that her belief is true. Phil believes that her belief is true. Sophia's desire and Phil's belief share the same content: that Sophia's belief that tens of thousands died is true. But the content of Phil's belief is not a conditional. His belief isn't that if tens of thousands died, then Sophia believes that. Such a belief would be true even if only seven people had died. The analysis of the content can't be different when viewed from the perspective of belief versus the perspective of desire. A conditional analysis would be considered a non-starter when considering Phil's belief, and so too should it be treated in the context of Sophia's desire.

No one—deflationist or not—should argue that (5), (6), or (7) provides an adequate analysis of (1). What is open to the deflationist is to argue that one of (5), (6), and (7) is an analysis

¹⁰ Which is not to say that he offers (5) as an analysis of (1). See also Field (1994: 265) on (6) and David (2001: 153) on (7).

of *Sophia's alethic desire*, and therefore (1) never was. I have been misdescribing Sophia all along in saying that she desires her beliefs to be true. She doesn't desire that her beliefs are true; that would be monstrous. My thought experiment has, from the beginning, been impossible: Sophia desires that her beliefs are true, but does not desire the contents of those beliefs. There can be no such person, if deflationism is correct. If there is a virtuous reconstruction of Sophia, then she must desire one of (5), (6), and (7), but *not* (1). She does not desire that her beliefs are true, precisely because contents like (1) cannot be analyzed in terms of (5), (6), or (7). (Anyone who takes talk of "desiring one's beliefs to be true" as an indirect or shorthand way for capturing conditional desires along the lines of (5), (6), and (7) must be rejecting deflationism, since there's no way to get from (1) and its use of 'true' to (5), (6), or (7) via the truth schema.)

Deflationists, therefore, are obliged to hold that my Sophia—who, *ex hypothesi*, is not a monster but still desires that her beliefs be true—is an impossible creation.¹¹ There cannot be someone who desires that the fruits of her intellectual endeavors are true without at the same time desiring the contents of her discoveries. It's simply incorrect to describe any actual person as desiring, in general, that their beliefs are true (at least without attending to the specific contents of any such belief). One can still be a virtuous epistemic agent; but desiring your beliefs to be true has nothing to do with that.

My response to this position is that, ultimately, it is *ad hoc*. The pressure to deem my description of Sophia incoherent is derived entirely from the strictures of the deflationary account itself. The deflationist has to divorce epistemic virtue from the desire for one's beliefs to be true. This strikes me as unduly revisionary. Describing Sophia as someone who desires that the beliefs she has formed as a result of her research are true is a straightforward and sensible way of describing her, and does not automatically entail that she is a monster. As a result, the role that 'true' plays in describing her goes beyond the bounds of the deflationary accounts. Anyone who thinks that talking about "desire for one's beliefs to be true" is a way of capturing something of epistemic value (perhaps by way of pointing us toward (5), (6), or (7)) is committed to thinking that 'true' must be capable of expressing something that goes beyond the truth schema.

Hence, even if the conditional accounts capture something important about epistemic virtue, they don't capture (1), which is itself the possible content of an alethic desire. Deflationists must deny that a desire with content (1) can be anything but monstrous, which I have argued is a revisionary consequence of deflationism, not an independently attractive conclusion. Deflationists, presumably, will accept that (1) is indeed a monstrous content, and hold that we were wrong to

¹¹ I gather that this is the line that Horwich (2013) would take.

think otherwise. That is to say, it is a mistake to think there is any epistemic virtue to be found in desiring one's beliefs to be true. They may in turn fall back to (5), (6), or (7) as accounts of the alethic desire that I (falsely) tried to capture with (1). The question of the independent acceptability of (5), (6), and (7) as accounts of alethic desire, or what it is to be a "lover of truth", is a large one beyond the scope of this paper. But since deflationists must turn to one of the conditional accounts to capture alethic desire (since (1) is not available to them), it will be worth highlighting some difficulties with the accounts themselves.

Consider the basic structure to Sophia's desire. She has formed a belief, communicated it to others, and now desires that she has followed through with this process correctly. In a moment of doubt, she consults her notes to verify it. If she confirms her belief, she feels relief: her desire has been satisfied. If she discovers that she was wrong, that her belief was false, then she feels disappointed: she has failed, and her desire has gone unsatisfied. The conditional beliefs do not share this structure. (5) is such that Sophia's turning out to be wrong would *satisfy* the desire. If Sophia's belief is false, then (5) is true, rendering desires for it satisfied. But getting your beliefs wrong is the opposite of satisfying your alethic desires, not the perfect manifestation of it. One structural problem for (6) is that it could be satisfied by abandoning the belief in question. This, too, is incongruent with Sophia's desire. In her moment of doubt, she can't satisfy her desire by simply abandoning her belief. Doing so would satisfy her goal of *not being wrong*, but there is more to Sophia's desire than not being wrong. (7), too, allows for odd ways of satisfaction. A desire for (7) could be satisfied even if Sophia had never had the belief in question. But Sophia's desire is directly focused *on that belief*. It would be immensely odd if Sophia's desire that concerns a particular belief of hers could be satisfied by such a belief never existing in the first place. These considerations are not conclusive, of course.¹² But an advantage for non-deflationists is that they can admit that (1) captures an important kind of alethic desire in case (5), (6), and (7) do not.

Finally, let me make clear that a concessionary response from the deflationist is not appropriate here. A deflationist might concede my point about the semantic function of 'true', but go on to note that this still in no way shows that the property of truth is metaphysically substantive. So an overall mostly deflationary perspective on truth is still warranted. Of course it is true that my objection against one plank of deflationism doesn't automatically implicate the others. My objection has implications for the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of truth; it concerns the linguistic function of 'true' and the content that the concept of truth contributes to thoughts that are expressed with it. It doesn't obviously implicate the metaphysical dimensions of the property

¹² See also Piller's (2009) arguments that desires like (6) and (7) are not epistemically virtuous at all, but rather constitutive of an epistemically vicious dogmatism.

of truth. Deflationary theories of truth are typically committed to fully deflationary accounts of all dimensions of truth—linguistic, conceptual, and metaphysical. My argument is that even if deflationists are correct about the property of truth, they have underestimated the roles played by our alethic vocabulary and concepts.¹³

6. Alethic desires and substantivism

My argument is that alethic desires reveal that deflationary analyses of truth are inadequate. Do non-deflationary theories face a similar problem? They do not, because they are not committed to deflationism's austere perspective on the minimal (or even empty) content that 'true' adds to our thoughts and utterances. The fundamental deflationist premise is that there is nothing more to truth than what is given by the equivalence schemas. This is the source of the pressure they face to offer truth-free alternatives to alethically-laden contents solely by relying on those equivalences. Substantivists do not undertake that commitment, and so are free to accept the conclusion that Sophia's case reveals: there is more to <S's belief that p is true> than simply < p > or <S believes that p and p >.

Like deflationists, substantivists endorse the equivalences captured by the various truth schemas. They grant the mutual inferability between < p >, << p > is true>, <Any belief that p is true>, and others. What they do not grant is that the role that truth plays in alethically-laden claims is semantically dispensable. For a correspondence theorist (e.g., Rasmussen 2014), ascribing truth to a proposition or sentence is ascribing to it a robust property, for which they provide a further account. Thus, truth for substantivists is not exhausted by the various truth equivalences. They are therefore free to deny that a desire for (1) is to be exhaustively analyzed by (2), (3), or (4), though they agree that these are all at least materially equivalent. Those equivalences show that Sophia's desires are inconsistent: she can't get what she wants (concerning her epistemic values) without getting what she doesn't want (concerning her moral values). But the crucial difference between substantivists and deflationists is that the former, and the former alone, can maintain that Sophia herself is possible. She has a desire that her belief that p is true, but no desire that p . On the deflationists' picture, truth has nothing to contribute to the contents of our mental states. As a result, they cannot acknowledge the existence of someone like Sophia, since their account of her alethic desire forces her to have a monstrous desire that she does not possess. Substantivists disagree amongst themselves as to what sort of semantic content truth contributes to our mental states. (My comments, for example, suggest that 'true' is also sometimes used to invoke some kind

¹³ Bar-On and Simmons 2007 is a particularly adroit exploration of the three different dimensions of deflationism.

of epistemic norm or value.) But that there is content there that goes beyond the equivalence schemas is sufficient for them to avoid the challenge to deflationists that is revealed by alethic desires.

7. Conclusion

Ultimately, Sophia's desire for her belief to be true is just that: a desire *that her belief is true*. This content resists any familiar deflationist reduction, and cannot be replaced by a very different conditional. But the ramifications extend well beyond alethic desires. If Sophia's desire that her belief is true resists deflationist analysis, so too does her belief that her belief is true. That fact, again, is initially not at all obvious. When we think about 'S's belief that *p* is true' in the context of it being the content of a belief, the deflationist analyses appear to be perfectly sufficient. It's only when we consider desire states with the same content that the problem becomes visible. Introducing desires into the discussion doesn't create the problem; it reveals a problem that was already there. Alethic desires, then, aren't peculiarly problematic for deflationists; rather, their existence sheds light on the fact that even supposedly easy cases spell trouble for deflationists. Hence, it appears that there is more to 'true' than the deflationist may allow.

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