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The Dependence of Truth on Being: Is there a Problem for Minimalism?

Abstract. The aim of this paper is first to defend the intuition that truth is grounded in how things are and, second, to argue that this fact is consistent with Minimalism. After having cashed out that intuition in terms of explanatory claims of the form 'if it is true that p, it is true that p because p', I set out an argument against Minimalism which is based on the same intuition, and I argue that a strategy the minimalist could adopt to resist the argument, i.e. to deny the correctness of the intuition, is flawed. Then I explain why the intuition is correct and I make some claims concerning the kind of explanations which are involved in it. Now the stage is set up to present the right way for the minimalist to resist the argument. I finally answer some objections.

1.   The Dependence of truth on being

There are things we believe and assert. Some of those things are true, others are not. Whether such a thing is true or not does not depend on our desires concerning its truth or on how accurate our method of inquiry is: truth does not seem to be at our disposal. Whether these things are true seems not to depend on their intrinsic features alone: we cannot decide about their truth just by inspecting them. We have to look outside them. Where? At the world: the world is what our assertions and beliefs are about, therefore whether what we believe and assert is true or not seems to depend on just one thing: whether the world is the way we say it is.

This commonsense intuition goes hand in hand with another one: how the world is does not depend on whether the things we say are true. How the world is, in a certain respect, rather depends on how the world is in other respects, provided it depends on anything.

The previous facts can be summed up, perhaps with a more metaphysical flavour, by the following slogan: truth is grounded in being but not the other way around.

Since the dependence-relation between the truth of what we believe and assert and the way the world is is asymmetrical, it cannot be just counterfactual dependence: assume that I believe that Nicola is tall and that what I believe is true, surely if Nicola had not been tall what I believe would not have been true, but it is also the case that if what I believe had not been true Nicola would not have been tall. The dependence pointed at here rather seems to be an explanatory dependence: it is not because I truly believe that Nicola is tall that Nicola is tall; rather it is because Nicola is tall that I believe something true in believing that he is tall.[1]

Generalising from the preceding example, and using the word 'proposition' as a noun for the things we believe and assert, the asymmetrical dependence between truth and how things are can be expressed with this general principle

Principle of the Groundedness of Truth (GT)

If a proposition is true, it is true because the world is a certain way; but if the world is that way, it is not so because the proposition is true.

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[1] Aristotle (Metaphysics, Θ 10, 1051^b 6-9) stresses this intuition. Künne (2003: 150-154) has drawn new attention to this remark by Aristotle.

Assuming that 'that'-clauses are canonical singular terms for propositions and that the sentence embedded in the that-clause specifies the way the world must be in order that the proposition be true the particularizations of the previous principle are instances of the schema:

(B)   If it is true that p, it is true that p because p but it is not the case that if p, p because it is true that p

Our disposition to assent to (GT) and to the (non paradoxical) instances of (B) manifests what can be called the intuition of the asymmetrical dependence of truth on being, for brevity **T**(truth)**D**(depends on)**B**(being), also known as Correspondence intuition (since it is the intuition by which the supporters of the Correspondence theory of truth have been particularly struck).[2]

2.   TDB, Truth-maker Theory and Minimalism

A central tenet of truth-maker theory is expressed by the following principle (or a suitably restricted version of it):

Truthmaker Maximalism (TM)
If a proposition is true there is an entity making it true.

An entity which makes a proposition true is an entity whose existence explains why the proposition is true, the truth's ontological ground.[3]
TDB is perhaps the main reason provided by supporters in favour of TM: we need to embrace TM since otherwise our firm belief that truth is grounded will be doomed to be ungrounded.[4]
The fact that TM supporters claim that TM is needed to explain an important fact about truth makes truth-maker theory something which philosophers sympathetic with conceptions of truth not committed to truth-makers have to face: in fact, if TM is indeed needed to explain some important fact about truth, any of these conceptions of truth will be mistaken.
So-called deflationary conceptions of truth are certainly of this kind.
It is a notoriously hard job to identify what all the conceptions of truth which have been labelled as 'deflationist' have in common. At the cost of some simplification I identify them by the conjunction of three claims. The first one is that the sole role of the truth-predicate is that of allowing us to endorse infinite sets of sentences. The second one is that this role is accounted for by the conceptual equivalence between non-blind ascriptions of the truth-predicate and truth-bearers to which truth is ascribed. The third one, which follows from the first two, is that the sentences which are instances of schemas such as

(T)   It is true that p *iff* p

or

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[2] It could be claimed that not every instance of (B) is true pointing to logical or conceptual truths like the propositions that if snow is green then snow is green and that bachelors are unmarried which seem to be true regardless of how the world is. To this I reply, as several philosophers did (Boghossian (1996), Williamson (2007: ch. 3)), that these propositions are true regardless of how the world contingently is but not of how the world necessarily is: if it is true that bachelors are unmarried this is true because bachelors are unmarried.
[3] Talk of truth's ontological grounds was introduced by Bergmann (1967). Saying that a truth-maker for p is something whose existence explains why p is true does not involve claiming that the notion of *making true* should be analysed in terms of explanatory notions (as in Schnieder (2006), Caputo (2007) Liggins (2008)); one can in fact just claim that this is at least a necessary condition for being a truth-maker (however not everyone engaged in the truth-maker debate agrees, see Parsons (1999)).
[4] For a defence of TM along these lines: Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005).

(T1)   'p' is true *iff* p

(so-called T-equivalences or T-biconditionals) tell the whole story about truth. A corollary of this latter claim is that truth cannot be explicitly defined but is at best susceptible of an implicit definition.

Since T-equivalences do not involve any general commitment to truth-makers and, according to the deflationist, they tell the whole story about truth, deflationary conceptions of truth are not committed to truth-makers. This is clearly true also of the variant of Deflationism by far most discussed in the last twenty years, Horwich's (1990) Minimalism. Minimalism is the conception of truth according to which Minimal Theory (MT), the theory comprising all, and solely, the propositions which are expressed by non-paradoxical instances of schema (T), is an adequate theory of truth, that is to say one which explains any fact involving truth, eventually in conjunction with other theories, in case the fact that must be explained involves not only truth but also something else (this is what Gupta (1993) calls the 'Adequacy Thesis'). I think that, as far as TDB is concerned, Minimalism can be considered representative of other forms of Deflationism, since both the problems that Minimalism may have in accounting for TDB and the solutions I will present for them, stem from the claim that T-equivalences tell the whole story about truth and this, as we have seen, is a trademark of deflationary conceptions of truth. So in what follows, for the sake of clarity and brevity, I will focus on Minimalism.

When a given claim (say TM) is justified as the best explanation of a fact (TDB), and one wants to undermine that claim, two ways are open to do so: either one gives up the fact or one grants the fact and denies that the claim is the best explanation of it. So the minimalist has two ways to argue against TM, as a piece of the theory of truth: a) denying TDB; b) accepting TDB and denying that TM is needed to account for it.

In both cases the minimalist could claim, following Lewis (2001a/b), that the most charitable way to understand TM is understanding it as a claim concerning not truth but something else (for instance which kind of facts are metaphysically fundamental) where truth is used just for the sake of brevity.[5]

(a) might, at a first glance, seem a hopeless move: TDB appears to be an intuition which is deeply entrenched with our concept of truth, so denying it seems to assume a highly revisionary stance just for the sake of saving Minimalism from criticism. But appearances notwithstanding (a) could be tempting for the minimalist. The reason is that TDB can be used to mount the following argument against Minimalism:[6]

<div align="center">Because Argument</div>

(1)   'Because' sentences are not entailed by the corresponding T-biconditionals (since 'because' differs from 'iff' in being a non commutative and non truth-functional connective). Therefore

(2)   No T-biconditional is such that the corresponding instances of the schema (B) can be inferred from it. So

(3)   MT alone cannot account for TDB. But

(4)   TDB is an essential fact concerning truth (one which concerns truth and nothing else). Therefore

(5)   MT alone cannot account for an essential fact concerning truth. But

(6)   From the Adequacy Thesis it follows that if a fact is an essential fact concerning truth, in order for Minimalism to be true this fact must be explainable on the basis of MT alone (since the adequacy thesis allows the use of other theories besides MT only in so far as the fact to be explained involves not only truth but also other things). Therefore

(7)   Minimalism is false.

Now, how can the minimalist resist this argument? Since all the inferential steps seem to be valid the only thing he can do is to deny some of the premises, and the only questionable premise of the argument seems to be premise (4). Given that (4) amounts to the conjunction of the two claims that instances of schema (B) are true and that they concern only truth, in order to deny (4) one must argue against one of these two claims. But it may seem difficult to deny that if instances of (B) are true, the facts they state involve truth and

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[5] This is a stance towards which several people are sympathetic: see for instance Caputo (2007), Cameron (2008), (forthcoming).

[6] If not exactly the argument the line of reasoning it makes explicit can be found in Vision (1997, 2004, 2010), David (2002), Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005). The argument is also presented (but not endorsed) in Künne (2003: 151) and Stoljar and Damjanovic (2010).

nothing else: the concept of truth is in fact the only concept which appears in all of them. In this respect such instances seem to be on a par with the T-biconditionals: truths which concern purely the truth. So the minimalist may find it easier to argue for the claim that the instances of (B) are simply false. Given that any such instances are conditional sentences which are false if the antecedent is true and the consequent false, what the minimalist must do is to claim that the instances of the following schema

(BT)   It is true that p because p

obtained by substituting 'p' with a true sentence are false if they are understood as expressing explanatory claims. In the next paragraph I set out three ways by which a minimalist could defend this claim and I argue that they are flawed. .

3.   Some arguments against TDB

The first argument, put forward by Douven-Hindriks (2005), is based on the idea that sentences which are immediately recognized as logically equivalent by any competent speaker are substitutable, salva explanatory force, in explanatory contexts. If this is true, then the instances of (BT) have the same explanatory force as those of the schema

(BT*)   It is true that p because it is true that p

since any competent speaker of English accepts the T-equivalences solely on the basis of her understanding of them. But the instances of (BT*) are no explanations at all, so neither are those of (BT).
What justifies the first premise of the argument? Douven-Hindriks' idea is that, since explaining something involves providing information which improves understanding of it, nothing is gained and nothing is lost in substituting in an explanation the explanans sentence with another one which does not differ from it in informativeness. If, moreover, it is granted that sentences which are immediately recognized as logically equivalent by any competent speaker do not differ in informativeness, it follows that they are substitutable as explanantia salva explanatory force of the explanation.
The main problem I see with the latter argument is that it is very hard to find a notion of informativeness whereby both its premises come out true.
To begin, if one equates the informativeness of a sentence with its truth-conditions, understood as sets of possible worlds, any pair of logical equivalent sentences will carry the same information. However there are a lot of sentences which are logically equivalent (also quite trivially logically equivalent) which are not substitutable, salva explanatory force, in explanatory contexts. For instance, 'Romeo died' and 'Romeo died and it is raining or it is not raining' are quite trivially logically equivalent but 'Juliet killed herself because Romeo died' is true whether 'Juliet killed herself because Romeo died and it is raining or it is not raining' is false.
Even to resort to a more fine grained notion of informativeness, such as one which identifies the information provided by a sentence with the structured proposition it expresses, won't do. Provided that proper names are directly referential expressions' 'Clark Kent is Clark Kent' and 'Clark Kent is Superman', express the same structured proposition but, as Douven and Hindriks themselves stress, 'Lois has nothing to fear because Clark Kent is Superman', differently from 'Lois has nothing to fear because Clark Kent is Clark Kent', seems to be a good explanation.
So perhaps the notion of informativeness here at stake is still more fine-grained, for instance the notion of cognitive significance or cognitive value of an expression. But this creates the following problem for the argument. A criterion for establishing the difference in cognitive value among expressions is the so-called *Frege criterion*: two expressions *e* and *e'* differ in cognitive value if they are not substitutable salva veritate in belief-ascriptions. Now, consider the following sentences:

(8)   It is true that snow is white

(9)   Snow is white

(10) It is true that snow is white because snow is white

(11) It is true that snow is white because it is true that snow is white

(12) Benjamin believes that it is true that snow is white because snow is white

(13) Benjamin believes that it is true that snow is white because it is true that snow is white

Since Benjamin, like many other people, is disposed to assent to (10) and not to (11), (12) is true and (13) is false. But (13) differs from (12) solely for the fact that (8) has been substituted, to the second occurrence of (9). So the two sentences are not substitutable salva veritate in belief ascriptions. Can we conclude, by the Frege Criterion, that (8) and (9) differ in cognitive value?

Here Douven and Hindriks face a dilemma. One option one has is to deny that this application of Frege-criterion is legitimate, pointing to the fact that it cannot be ruled out from the start that 'because'-contexts are similar to quotational contexts, that 'because', like quotation-marks, operates on features of the expressions it bounds which are different from their content (individuated in whatever fine-grained way). If this were the case then from the fact that someone believes that p because q but does not believe that p because r it could not be inferred that 'q' and 'r' have different cognitive value in the same way that it cannot be inferred that 'snow' and 'neige' differ in cognitive value from the fact that someone believes that 'snow' has four letters and does not believe that 'neige' has four letters. Therefore what can at most be concluded from the application of Frege-criterion is that (10) and (11) (and not their constituent sentences) have different cognitive value. But if one take this route, one must also grant that 'because' creates hyper-opaque contexts, i.e. contexts in which substitution *salva veritate* of expressions which are cognitively equivalent does not hold, so the premise of the argument according to which sentences which have the same cognitive value are substitutable in because-contexts, is false. The other option one has is to claim that 'because' does not create such hyper-opaque contexts. However, if 'because' does not create hyper-opaque contexts, the Frege-criterion is legitimately extensible from these contexts to sentences embedded in them and therefore from the failure of substitutivity in (12) and (13) it can be inferred that (8) and (9) do not have the same cognitive value, and in this case the other premise of the argument is false.

Since there seem to be no way to make true both its premises, the argument which should support one premise of Douven-Hindriks argument against TDB is unsound and therefore this premise remains in need of justification. Therefore, until such a justification is provided, the argument should be rejected.

The second argument starts by observing that if one asks 'Why is it true that p?' the answer 'Because p' will not normally count as a good explanation[7]. From this fact it is concluded that what is said by the instances of (BT) is not an explanation at all.[8] In order to see why the argument is unsound, one must be clear about the distinction between an act of explaining, a kind of assertion which consists of asserting propositions typically expressed (in English) by sentences of the form 'p because q' and the proposition which is thereby asserted.[9] Since, as Lewis (1986) observed, giving an explanation is providing an answer to a question which is a request for some kind of information, an explanatory act can be unsuccessful in all the manners in which an act of providing information can be: the information provided must in fact be of the right kind and of the right amount given the practical and cognitive goals of the person asking for the explanation. The first basic condition that an explanatory act must satisfy in order to be successful is that the proposition asserted be true, otherwise no information will be provided. But there seem to be at least two other constraints: in the first instance that the information provided be the kind of information requested in the context (the relevance constraint) and in the second instance that the information be new for the agents seeking the explanation (the novelty of information constraint).[10] From this it follows that if the explanatory proposition asserted in an answer to a why-question is a proposition knowledge of which is considered as background knowledge in a given context, the explanation will be evaluated as a bad explanation since it violates the novelty of information constraint, although the proposition asserted is evaluated as true. These are cases in which the

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[7] Künne (2003: 150) points out this fact.

[8] Considerations of this kind can be found in Douven-Hindriks (2005) and Liggins (2010) (concerning explanations such as 'he is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man').

[9] The distinction is accepted by philosophers who have very different views about the nature of explanation, such as Van Fraassen (1980), Achinstein (1983), Lewis (1986), Ruben (1990). On this see also Schnieder (2006).

[10] Jenkins (2008) correctly stresses that the novelty of information constraint applies not to the explanans proposition (which may be already known by the person seeking an explanation) but to the explanation as a whole.

explanation will sound trivial since the pieces of information provided by the explanation sound trivial. But trivial information and explanations are still information and explanations, although any competent speaker already knows them. Therefore the reason why, in normal contexts, when someone asks 'Why is it true that p?' the answer 'Because p' is considered a bad one could be the following: since the information provided by the proposition that it is true that p because p is one that any competent speaker is supposed to know, someone asking why it is true that p is seeking a further explanation of this fact, namely an explanation of the fact that p, which, *via* the trivial explanation that it is true that p because p, will also count as an explanation of why the proposition that p is true.[11] The information provided by the instances of (BT) will not therefore be, in such contexts, the relevant information since the relevant information was about the fact that p. This is the reason why the answer provided by uttering an instance of (BT), if we somehow manage to seriously consider it as an answer to *this* request for information, will be considered at best as an utterance of the proposition that p because p, which is no explanation at all. However, that the proposition that p because p is not an explanation does not entail that a different proposition, namely the proposition that it is true that p because p*,* is not an explanation (although a trivial one). So the argument is invalid since the conclusion does not follow from the premise.

The last argument against TDB says that even granting that there are contexts where speakers are disposed to assent to instances of (BT), is not sufficient to show that they believe in TDB, since in these contexts the expression 'because' could be used not to express an explanatory connection between propositions but just to signal the presence of an inference, whereby the speaker is providing justifications or reasons (in the epistemic sense) for what he believes.[12] I think that this proposal faces problems. Notice, first of all, that in contexts where the speakers are competent with 'true', someone seeking a reason for believing that it is true that p will be someone asking for a reason to believe that p. Therefore, in such contexts, uttering 'p' to provide a reason to believe that it is true that p should be seen as at least as question begging as uttering 'p' for giving an explanation of why it is true that p. Moreover the proposal faces the following problem: if one accepts the standard analysis of what a reason is, according to which *a reason for r* is *a premise of a sound argument which has r as conclusion* it follows that, since 'It is true that p' and 'p' are mutually inferable (assuming the corresponding instance of (T)), either sentence can express a reason to believe the other. But then, on this account of what a reason is, one hasn't accounted in any different way from the explanation-account for the intuitions of asymmetry between 'It is true that p' and 'p': one is simply denying these intuitions and this revisionary stance should be based on some independent reason to reject TDB, such as those provided by the first two arguments which, if I'm right, are flawed.[13]The advocate of the reasons-account could reply that there are more fine-grained accounts of what a reason is according to which 'p' expresses a reason for 'It is true that p' but not the other way around; for instance, she can appeal to a notion of a *canonical reason*, that is to say a reason for asserting a sentence which is part of the basic assertibility conditions for that sentence, where basic assertibility conditions for a sentence are those constitutive of the competence with it. According to this interpretation, 'because' in (GT) and schema (B) should be read as 'in order to decide whether', so that (GT) would express the correct intuition that in order to decide whether a proposition is true we must first decide whether the world is a certain way (but not the other way around). Moreover, she can stress that the minimalist can agree with the claim that 'p' expresses the basic assertibility

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[11] For the claim that an explanation of the form 'it is true that p because r' may be such in virtue of the fact that there is an explanation in which 'r' is the explanans and which is a step in a chain of explanations whose first step is 'it is true that p because p' see Schnieder (2006), Caputo (2007).

[12] Liggins (2010) put forward this argument against Schnieder's (2006) claim that sentences like 'Pietro is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man' express explanations. I think the argument could be addressed also against the purported truth-explanations.

[13] There is some similarity between what I say here and some of Schnieder's (2010) remarks against Liggins' (2010) claim that those who take sentences like 'John is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man' as being explanatory confuse them with truly explanatory metalinguistic sentences like '"is a bachelor" applies to John because he is an unmarried man'. Schnieder points out that if we really committed this use-mention mistake, then one should expect us also to confuse 'John is a bachelor because he is a bachelor' and 'John is an unmarried man because he is a bachelor' respectively with '"bachelor" applies to John because he is a bachelor', and '"unmarried man" applies to John because he is a bachelor', but we don't, since we tend to reject the former and accept the latter (in the second case I find Schnieder's point less convincing: after all we tend also to reject '"unmarried man" applies to John because he is a bachelor'). Our strategies are similar in pointing to a loss of asymmetry when one moves from the non meta-linguistic explanatory understanding of some sentences to the reasons-giving and the meta- linguistic understandings.

conditions for 'it is true that p' but not the other way around, so that the reasons-account provides the minimalist with a good way out of the Because argument.

Although I think that there is some truth in this line of reasoning (see §6 below), what it entails is at most that there is an interpretation of the sentences expressing TDB according to which these sentences do not express explanations but true claims of a different kind and that this interpretation is in some contexts the correct way to understand utterances of (GT) and of instances of (B). But that a sentence says something in some contexts does not exclude that it says something else in other contexts and that what is said by it in these latter contexts is true.

So not even the reasons-argument provides conclusive reasons to believe that TDB (understood as an explanatory claim) is false.

Not having sound reasons to believe that instances of (BT) do not express explanations does not equal having reasons to believe that they do. These reasons will be provided in the next paragraph.

4.   Why TDB is true

Since an explanation is a proposition which provides some kind of specific (explanatory) information on the explanandum, what must be done to argue that the instances of (BT) express explanations is to show that they do indeed carry some kind of explanatory information. I think that in order to do this one must describe some context in which, differently from what happens in ordinary contexts, asserting these sentences can be used in full-fledged explanatory acts. This methodology is justified by the consideration that although one must sharply distinguish explanatory propositions from explanatory acts, the former, at least in so far as they are what Jenkins (2008) calls 'Why-explanations', seems to be essentially something which can be asserted in answering a why-question. What justifies this latter claim is that one thing that the multifarious kinds of informational contents that count as why-explanations seem to have in common is that they are the kind of informational contents that can be looked for in asking 'Why?'[14]

In my view the contexts in which asserting an instance of (BT) counts as a full-fledged explanatory act are those in which someone is learning about both the language and the world. The example which follows is a situation where the word 'bachelor' is involved, I will then extend the conclusions drawn from this case to the truth predicate.[15] The reason for doing so is that I think that explanations expressed by sentences such as (14) and (15) below are paradigmatic cases of the kind of explanations to which truth-explanations belong.

(14)   John is a bachelor because John is an unmarried man

(15)   Someone is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man

So, imagine a child, Nicola, who hears the word 'bachelor' used by competent speakers around him for the first time: speaking to a friend, Nicola's mother says things like 'John is a bachelor', 'Bachelors are nice people'. Nicola trusts his mummy and defers to her, so by assenting to what his mother is saying he comes to believe that John is a bachelor and that bachelors, whatever else they are, are nice people; therefore Nicola is disposed to accept 'John is a bachelor' and 'Bachelors are nice people' but he has no disposition to accept 'John is an unmarried man', or 'Unmarried men are nice people': these pairs of sentences aren't therefore cognitively equivalent for him. Nicola begins to wonder about bachelors, about what being a bachelor consists in. And wondering about such things he asks his mother things like 'Why is someone a bachelor

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[14] I think that this is the right insight of the so-called pragmatic theories of explanation such as those developed by Van Fraassen (1980) and Achinstein (1983). Jenkins (2008) claims that *why-explanations* must be distinguished from other kinds of explanations such as, (for instance), how-explanations, what-explanations and 'explications' of concepts or words, although many of these explanations at least entail why-explanations. Schnieder (2009) argues that this is the case for how-explanations and what I will say in the following entails that this is also true for some 'explications'.

[15] The situation described in the example is a *Burge-case* (Burge (1978a), (1979)), one in which it seems correct to attribute to a subject beliefs whose content he does not fully understand. The importance of the phenomenon of believing without understanding in learning processes has been stressed by Recanati (1997), which develops a suggestion already made by Burge (1979). A situation of this kind is also described in Künne (2003: 370) .

Mum?' The mother, provided she succeeds in satisfying Nicola's request for information, will answer, with (15). The moral to be drawn from this kind of situation is that, in contexts of these kinds, sentences like (14) and (15) express explanatory information concerning, in Schnieder's (2010) words, what makes something thus and so, where 'something' can have both an existential reading (there is a thing such that being in a certain way makes it thus and so) or a universal reading (for whatever thing, being in a certain way makes it thus and so).

As far as property *talk* is considered as legitimate as talk in which predicates are used, at least in so far as properties talk provides a useful expressive tool for expressing generalisations (and this stance is congenial to a deflationist), it is safe to say that these kinds of explanations provide information concerning what it is for something to have a given property, what having this property consists in. This does not involve claiming that these explanations are *about* properties since no reference to properties is *prima facie* involved in sentences like (14) or (15). 'Concern' here must be understood in a less demanding way which entails just that (14) is equivalent to 'John has the property of being a bachelor because he is an unmarried man'. For the sake of generality from now ahead I will speak of these kinds of explanations using the properties talk, without assuming that it is in some way conceptually or metaphysically more fundamental than properties-free talk. So what is learnt by Nicola is what being a bachelor consists in, what it is for something to exemplify this property. Although this information and explanations are about the world and not the words, there is also a sense in which they convey semantic information and explanations. In fact believing that bachelors are unmarried men (through the sentence 'Bachelors are unmarried men') is what is needed for Nicola to become a competent speaker with 'bachelor': accepting the sentence 'Bachelors are unmarried men' is in fact the basic regularity of use which endows the word 'bachelor' with its meaning.[16] This is just implicit knowledge of meaning, it is not explicit knowledge of propositions such as the proposition that 'bachelor' applies to x iff x is an unmarried man. Explicit semantic information can be extracted by implicit knowledge in several ways: one way is through disquotational principles such as 'If the Fs are the Gs then "F" applies to x iff x is a G'. Another way is through answers to questions concerning the proper extension of a predicate: imagine Nicola asking his mother, 'Mum, why are only unmarried men, and not little kids like me, bachelors?' An appropriate answer to this question would seem to be 'There is no "because" here Nicola! Only unmarried men are bachelors since this is what "bachelor" means!'[17]

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[16] It could be pointed out that appealing to Burge-cases, which are central in the externalist picture of mind and language, and in the meantime claiming that acquiring some trivial beliefs about bachelors is required for Nicola to become a competent speaker, involves an inconsistency, since the core idea of externalism is that for many words competence does not require possession of any set of beliefs about the referents. But I think there is no inconsistency here: in fact Nicola's case is (like those presented in Burge (1978a)) one of a person who has beliefs whose content he does not fully understand and this lack of understanding is (at least in cases of trivially synonymous expressions like 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man') a lack of *linguistic* knowledge, as Burge himself recognises. The real point of these kinds of cases is exactly that, thanks to the phenomenon of deference, one can have beliefs involving a concept without possessing this concept (if concept possession is identified with possession of a set of abilities and beliefs) and being competent on the corresponding words. My position is not compatible just with a radical form of externalism (like the one endorsed by Williamson (2007)) according to which no word is such that being competent with it requires possession of some core beliefs and inferential or referential abilities.

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It could be stressed that understanding 'since' as a variant of the explanatory 'because' would make the mother inconsistent, since she would be asserting both that there is no explanation of the fact that only men can be bachelors and that there is such an explanation. So it seems more charitable (as suggested by Burge (1978a)) to interpret 'since' as signaling the presence of an inference: the reason to believe that only unmarried men are bachelors is that 'bachelor' means *unmarried man* (in fact the former conclusion follows from this premise together with the general principle: *if G and F are two predicates of English and G and F mean the same then necessarily all and only the Gs are F*). This is right but I think that there is also an explanatory understanding of 'since' in this context that is consistent with the first 'no "because"': the semantic fact that 'bachelor' means unmarried man is not presented as explaining the non semantic fact that only unmarried men are bachelors; it is rather put forward as an explanation of why this fact is a brute, primitive fact, that is to say a fact for which no explanation is available. Something similar is true, as we will see in §7, of the explanatory relation holding between linguistic facts and facts such as the fact that it is true that snow is white because snow is white or that John is a bachelor because John is an unmarried man.
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Explicit semantic information grounds semantic explanations, such as '"bachelor" applies to x because x is an unmarried man' which are answers to why-questions such as 'Why is it correct to apply to someone the word "bachelor"?' [18]

Something similar to what has been said for 'bachelor' holds also for 'true'. When someone doesn't know the meaning of the word 'true' the proposition that it is true that snow is white because snow is white is an explanation which gives information concerning the property of being true: what is learned, in this case, is not what being true consists in, what it is for an arbitrary thing to exemplify the property of being true, but just what it is for the proposition that snow is white to exemplify this property, the conditions which, provided they are satisfied, make that particular proposition true (what is usually called truth-conditions). From this information one can extract semantic information concerning the application conditions of the truth-predicate to a particular proposition; such information can count as an explanation answering a why-question of the form 'Why is it correct to apply the predicate "is true" to the proposition that p?'

Since being a competent speaker with 'true' amounts to knowing these pieces of information, these explanations are trivial for competent speakers; but trivial explanation is still explanation, although pragmatically unsatisfactory. Further evidence for this claim is provided by the following facts. In the first place, in a context where speakers are competent with 'true' the degree of perceived unsuccessfulness of asserting an instance of (BT) seems to be lower than that of asserting an instance of (BT*) as an answer to the question 'Why is it true that p?': while in fact the evaluation of the second answer will be to consider it no explanation at all, it seems to me that the more natural reaction to the first answer would be to say 'Yes of course, but why p?' In the second place while competent speakers are never disposed to accept as a good explanation the instances of (BT*), they are disposed to assent to instances of (BT) provided that the right sentential contexts is provided, as for instance in:

(16)   Is it true that snow is white because snow is white, or is snow white because it is true that snow is white?

which invites the addressee to choose between two different explanations. I think that no philosophically unbiased ordinary speaker, would reply 'Neither' or 'Both'. They would reply 'The first one is true!'

The explanation of these facts is precisely that while answers which are instances of (BT*) and of 'p because it is true that p' violate all three norms governing acts of explanation (truth, novelty and relevance), answers which are instances of (BT) violate just the last two norms, so although they are evaluated as bad answers they are still considered as better answers than the former.

5.   Conceptual explanations?

Künne (2003: 155) and Schnieder (2006) claim that the preceding explanations are conceptual explanations. Is this right? The answer depends on what one means by 'conceptual'. There are at least three possible understandings of this expression: 1) the semantic understanding according to which a conceptual explanation is one which *concerns* concepts;[19] 2) the epistemic understanding according to which a conceptual explanation is an explanation that we know just by virtue of the possession of some concepts; 3) the metaphysical understanding according to which a conceptual explanation is one which is true in virtue of concepts and relations between them. It seems to me false that the preceding explanations are conceptual in the semantic sense. In fact they provide information concerning what it is for something to have a property, what having this property consists in and not, for instance, what it is for someone to possess the corresponding concept, or the ways in which we represent things as having that property

Explanations of this kind are those given in philosophy (sometimes but not always in the form of analyses) but, as far as the topic of such explanations is concerned, there seems not to be any substantial difference

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[18] The idea that these explanations can be the contents of successful explanatory acts in situations in which competence with the explanandum is acquired is due to Künne (2003: 155), although I'm not sure whether Künne has in mind the indirect way of providing semantic information, which I pointed out, or if he thinks that the semantic information is the literal content of the explanations in question.

[19] I use the label 'semantic' for this sense of 'conceptual' because, according to this understanding, concepts are the *topic* of conceptual explanations, that is to say they are involved in their subject-matter, and the subject matter of a sentence should be closely related to its semantic content.

between them and explanations based on theoretical reductions such as 'This is water because it is H2O'. As far as their topic is concerned, all these explanations are better described as *metaphysical* and not conceptual explanations, since they are concerned more with why things are, what and how they are rather than with how we *represent* things. [20]

Rather, it seems to be true that these explanations are conceptual in the epistemic sense although I think that one gains both in evidential sources and in empirical adequacy in speaking of linguistic competence instead of concepts and concept possession. And it is indeed just by virtue of our linguistic competence that we are justified in asserting explanations such as (14), (15) or the instances of (B). Since we have a priori knowledge of these metaphysical explanations I will call them *metaphysical-a priori explanations*. On the contrary, we need empirical enquiry to gain knowledge of the fact that something is water because it is H_2O: this is however just an epistemological difference, not a difference concerning the kind of information involved.[21] There are properties, like being a bachelor and being true, which seem to be more language-shaped than others, since our linguistic competence provides us with knowledge of what it is for something to possess them, whereas other properties, like being water, are such that their nature completely transcends our linguistic competence. A plausible way to explain this difference is by pointing to the different ways in which predicates can be introduced in language: through explicit or implicit definitions or by ostensive definitions which point to concrete samples of things to which the predicates apply. When a predicate is introduced in language through explicit or implicit definitions it is endowed with its meaning simply by virtue of the fact that speakers regard as true some sentences in which it occurs (as, for instance, 'Bachelors are unmarried men');[22] in such cases therefore one's linguistic competence provides knowledge of what having the corresponding property consists in. When, on the contrary, a predicate is introduced in language pointing to concrete samples of things to which it applies, an essential part of what endows such a predicate with its meaning is that it is used in the presence of extra-linguistic items so that reference of the word is determined independently by all those beliefs on the reference, which competent speakers are supposed to share (the so-called stereotype). Properties like bachelorhood and truth seem to have both a language-dependent feature and a language-independent one: on the one hand the linguistic practices by which the corresponding predicates are introduced provide empirically non revisable information concerning the nature of such properties; on the other hand the exemplification of these properties is not language- or mind-dependent since the definitions, explicit or implicit, or the inferential rules by which the use of corresponding predicates is governed, link the exemplification of the properties to mind- and language-independent matters, such as being unmarried (as far as the exemplification of bachelorhood is concerned), or snow's being white (as far as the exemplification of truth by the proposition that snow is white is at stake).[23]

I want to stress that this difference between language-shaped properties and other properties does not involve neither that *all* information concerning the nature of the former can be gathered without empirical enquiry nor that the information which is gathered a priori is the metaphysically most fundamental. For instance, if that a person has a Y chromosome explains what it is for that person to be a male, and if reflecting light in a certain way explains what it is for something to be white then

(17)   John is a bachelor because he is an unmarried person with a Y chromosome

and

(18)   It is true that snow is white because snow reflects light in a certain way

are explanations of John's bachelorhood and of the truth of the proposition that snow is white which are not a priori and are metaphysically more fundamental respectively than (10) and (14).[24]

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[20] Schnieder (2010) calls these explanations 'Analytical'.

[21] For the claim that the difference between philosophical and scientific analyses is basically epistemological and that this difference must be traced back to differences in the standards on linguistic competence for different predicates see King (1998).

[22] On this see Horwich (1997).

[23] These ideas clearly draw on those developed by Neofregeans such as Hale and Wright (2000) within the debate on apriori-knowledge and the nature and existence of numbers as well as on Schiffer's (1996, 2003) pleonastic Platonism.

[24] This example is due to the editors of this volume.

Nonetheless there is at least one respect in which (10) and (14) are the most fundamental explanations: they are, as Schnieder (2006) points out, the *most direct* explanations of John being a bachelor and of the proposition's being true, since the other explanations of these facts must be such that their explanantia explain respectively why John is an unmarried man and why snow is white.

Metaphysical-a priori explanations are conceptual explanations also in the metaphysical sense, with the qualification that I think that facts involving concepts are grounded in facts involving linguistic competence. And this is the reason why we can gather knowledge of these explanations so easily, solely on the basis of linguistic competence. The reasons for this claim are the following. These explanations, and the facts they point to, involve asymmetries: it is a fact that John is a bachelor because he is an un married man but not the other way around; it is a fact that being a bachelor consists in being an unmarried man but not the other way around. But these asymmetries seems to me correctly explainable only on the basis of the features of linguistic competence with the expressions occurring in the sentences by which we express them. Let me explain this point starting from what Schnieder (2010) claims about the asymmetries involved in these explanations, since I am in part sympathetic with him but I part company with him in some respects. He claims that the connective expressed by 'because' operates in these explanations not on the propositions which are expressed by the sentences connected by 'because' when they are taken in isolation, but on these propositions under linguistic modes of presentation. This seems to me convincing, but it implies that the asymmetries in these explanations are explained by facts involving both concepts, taken as the constituents of propositions, and linguistic expressions. For instance, what explains the asymmetry involved in (14) and (15) is that the expression 'unmarried man' represents the concept BACHELOR in a more informative way than the expression 'bachelor' does, in so far as it represents how that concept relates to more primitive concepts such as the concept MALE and the concept UNMARRIED (I guess that the it relates to them by consisting in their conjunction).[25] But in the first place if one grants this one must recognise, as Schnieder does, that what is tracked by the asymmetry of 'because' is a difference between expressions in their intended interpretation and I think that facts concerning the intended interpretation of expressions are determined by facts concerning linguistic competence, by facts concerning how competent speakers *use* words. In the second place I think that the facts concerning the concept BACHELOR and its relations to more primitive concepts as well as features of concepts such as their *primitiveness* or *relative simplicity* are grounded in facts involving linguistic competence. For instance, what it is for the concept MAN to be more primitive and more simple than the concept BACHELOR is for the competence with 'bachelor' (and with translations of it) to depend on the competence with 'man' (and with translations of it). What it is for the concept BACHELOR to be the concept consisting of the conjunction of the concepts MAN and UNMARRIED is for the competence with 'bachelor' to consist of the competence with 'unmarried man' (and not the other way around). This explanatory dependence of facts involving concepts on facts regarding linguistic competence could be further advocated stressing, in the first place, that whatever concepts are (and this is a very obscure matter), the possession and structure of concepts is manifested by our linguistic competence with the corresponding words and by the features of such competence; in the second place that it is notoriously difficult to state identity conditions for concepts which are free of reference to facts involving language and linguistic competence. A plausible statement of identity conditions for concepts could take the following form: *the concept Q is the concept P if 'Q' REL 'P'* where 'REL' denotes an appropriately chosen relation holding between linguistic expressions (such as the relation of *interpretation* or the identity relation between the linguistic competences with the expressions). Talk of concepts seems to me, at least in many contexts, an expressive tool for describing facts which involve linguistic competence, abstracting from specific languages and their mutual relations.

In the next paragraph this picture will be applied to the account of the asymmetry in the truth-explanations and I will argue that this kind of account should be congenial to the minimalist.

6.   Minimalism and TDB

If, all things considered, there are good reasons to consider TDB as a trivial commonsense truth, how can the minimalist resist the Because-argument?

The best way to do it is not by denying that TDB is a fact, but rather by denying that TDB is a fact which involves only truth. Although in fact the truth predicate is the only one which appears in the instances of the

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[25] Expressions of the form 'the concept F', are singular terms which denote the concept expressed by 'F', in a similar way in which a that-clause denotes the proposition expressed by the sentence embedded in it.

schema (B), there is another linguistic expression which is shared by all of them: the connective 'because'. This is an expression that, at least in some contexts, is used to express explanations, therefore it is not a surprise that the facts to which instances of (B) point cannot be explained solely on the basis of MT; we must also consider facts concerning explanations of a specific kind: metaphysical-a priori explanations. To think so does not commit one to the implausible claim that the propositions expressed by sentences of the form 'p because q' involve the concept of explanation, but just to the much more plausible claim that these propositions are true just in case the proposition expressed by 'p' is explained by the proposition expressed by 'q'.[26] The Because-argument pointed to a feature of many (and perhaps all) explanations: that they exhibit an asymmetry of the explanatory relation holding between explanans and explanandum. I have moreover claimed that, as far as metaphysical-a priori explanations are concerned, these asymmetries must be traced back to asymmetries concerning linguistic competence with the corresponding predicates. How can the minimalist put together these claims and Minimal theory to provide an account of TDB?[27]

The kind of account of TDB I recommend to the minimalist is close to proposals made by Schnieder (2006) and Barker (2007).[28]

According to Schnieder (2006) explanatory asymmetry between 'it is true that p' and 'p' in schema (BT) depends on the fact that 'mastery of the concept of truth is constituted by the ability to relate statements involving it to statements involving only conceptual resources already at hand' (Schnieder 2006: 33), where the relation at stake is the logical relation 'iff' which connects the left and right-hand sides of the T-biconditionals. I think this is basically right with the qualification that since facts involving concepts are grounded in facts involving linguistic competence, what more fundamentally explains this explanatory asymmetry is that, in the first place, the disposition to accept sentences of the form 'It is true that p iff p' is what the linguistic competence with 'true' consists in; in the second place, although our competence with 'true' is not exhausted by the disposition to accept any single sentence of this form, this disposition is a necessary and sufficient condition to correctly use the corresponding truth-ascription and the same disposition is *not* needed to correctly use, and therefore to understand, the sentences which appear on the right hand side of the T-biconditionals.

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[26] This is the same strategy Horwich (1990: 71-72) adopts to argue that a logical truth such as *If a proposition is true, its negation is false* can be accounted for by Minimal theory: since this fact does not involve only truth but also *negation*, it can be explained by MT *plus* some propositions stating facts about negation, for instance an explicit or implicit definition of negation. For a criticism of this explanatory strategy see David (2007). If David's criticism of the strategy is right it applies also to the kind of minimalist explanation of TDB I propose here. There is no space here to discuss David's points so what will be shown in what follows is that Minimalism can provide an account of TDB which is *at least as good as* the accounts it provides for other facts involving truth.

[27] Horwich's (1990: 110-12) account of the explanatory asymmetry appeals to facts concerning the practice of giving explanations: when we want to explain why it is true that p we first explain why p and then, through the T-biconditional, we deduce that it is true that p, and thereby we explain why it is true that p. This account is unsatisfactory since, as Wright (1992: 27) pointed out, it just shows how anything which explains why p explains also why it is true that p; as far as the explanatory connection between 'p' and 'It is true that p' is concerned Horwich reduces it to the deducibility of the latter sentence from the former; but this does not work since, as Rodriguez Pereyra (2005) stresses, deducibility holds in both directions.

[28] See also Caputo (2005). Another account with which a Minimalist could be sympathetic is Hornsby's (2005), according to which the explanatory asymmetry between 'It is true that p' and 'p' is explained by the fact that more is required for the former sentence to be true than is required for the latter to be true, since the truth of the first sentence requires also the existence of the proposition to which truth is ascribed.

I think that Hornsby's account is at best incomplete since explanations such as the instances of (BT) are *full explanations*, where this at least involves that the truth of the *explanans* necessitates the truth of the *explanandum*. But the mere fact that the truth of a sentence requires all that is required by the truth of another one plus something else does not ensure necessitation of the former by the latter. Even granting that there is a sense of 'explanation' in which the truth of 'There are exactly five apples on the table' is *partially explained* by the truth of 'There are at least four apples on the table' this is not a full explanation, since the truth of the *explanans* does not necessitate the truth of the *explanandum*. Moreover it could be claimed that the truth of 'it is true that p' requires nothing more than the truth of 'p', since the condition a world must satisfy for the former sentence to be true, as evaluated at it, is that the proposition that p be true as evaluated at that world, and the condition that a world must satisfy in order the proposition that p be true, as evaluated at it, is just that p, which is the same condition that a world must satisfy in order for 'p' to be true at it.

Can the minimalist appeal to these facts? Of course she can! In fact according to the minimalist MT is an implicit definition of truth and this means that the disposition to accept T-biconditionals is the basic regularity governing our use of the word 'true', which endows the word with its intended meaning. Moreover, as in any definition, be it explicit or implicit, the definition may work only insofar as the definiens (in explicit definitions) and the matrixes in which the defined expression is inserted (in implicit definitions) are antecedently and independently understood. And this is something with which the minimalist should agree, provided she claims that MT gives an implicit definition of the truth predicate.[29] According to Barker (2007) the fact that the explanatory relation in each T-biconditional goes from the right-hand side to the left-hand side, and not the other way around, is explained by the fact that the right-hand sides are the premises in the introduction rules governing the use of the truth-predicate and not the other way around. In other words: while the canonical justification to assert a sentence of the form 'It is true that p' is provided by 'p' the converse is not the case.

This inferentialist account may be incorporated into my account since it specifies a way in which the competence with 'true' depends on the competence with the sentences which are truth-free: linguistic competence has in fact an inferential component and this component seems to be the essential one when an expression is introduced in the language by explicit or implicit definitions. Can the minimalist accept this? Again I think she can. In fact since a minimalist cannot endow the notion of truth with a substantive explanatory role in semantics she should endorse a use-theory of meaning according to which the meaning properties of linguistic expressions are determined by their use properties and among these use properties there can be inferential patterns, as in the case of logical connectives. Since MT is a set of biconditionals and the canonical way to prove biconditionals is to mutually derive the right- and left-hand sides, the minimalist may agree that the disposition to accept T-biconditionals is grounded in the disposition to accept the introduction rule 'p ⊢ it is true that p' and the elimination rule 'It is true that p ⊢ p'.[30]

One advantage of an account which incorporates the inferential dimension of the linguistic competence with the truth-predicate is that it provides an asymmetry between 'It is true that p' and 'p', which seems to mirror more directly the asymmetry in the explanatory relation in so far as both inference and explanation are, or point to, *consequential* relations (Jenkins (2008)) or *priority* relations (Schnieder (2010)) among facts or propositions.

7.   Objections and replies.

The first two objections, the *translation objection* and the *contingency objection*, concern my claim that metaphysical-a priory explanations are grounded in facts involving linguistic competence. How can this be the case if the facts to which these explanations point are clearly language-independent?[31]

The *translation-objection*, which goes back to Church's (1950) criticism of Carnap's (1947) metalinguistic analysis of belief-ascriptions, takes its start from the norm governing translation according to which good translations should preserve truth value. So if (19) were true (20), its translation in German, should also be true:

(19)   Someone is bachelor because he is an unmarried man *because* of the features of the linguistic competence on 'bachelor'[32]

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[29] My approach bears some similarities with Thomas (2011) in that we both think that the Because-argument does not work and that the deflationist can resist the argument by appealing to the fact that T-equivalences are parts of an implicit definition of the truth predicate. But similarities stop here: Thomas in fact claims that the deflationist may limit himself to stress that T-equivalences pragmatically convey the propositions of the form (BT) and that he can refuse to give an account of why these propositions are true. But the deflationist should not follow this strategy: the Because-argument in fact concludes that that Minimalism is false starting from the premises that TDB is true and that with T-equivalences alone one cannot explain this fact. But that a theory can pragmatically convey a given proposition does not say anything about the capacity of this theory of *explaning* why this proposition is true. And if the deflationist is not able to provide this explanation he is forced to make the hopeless move of denying that TDB is true. This is the option taken by Thomas when he asks rhetorically 'Why suppose that that intuition [i.e. TDB] points to a genuine feature of truth of which an account must be provided?' (Thomas 2011: 9).

[30] Horwich (1997: 438f.) uses the inferential model to describe the basic regularities of use which ground an explicit definition such as 'Bachelors are unmarried men'. I don't see why the same could not be used for an implicit definition of truth such as MT.

[31] Both these objections were pointed out to me by the editors of this volume.

(20)   Jemand ist ein Jungeselle weil er ist ein unverheiratete Mann auf grund der Eigenschaften der Kompetenz auf 'bachelor'.

But (20) will be evaluated as false by whoever understand it: why how Anglophone people use a word of their own language should have any import on what explains why bachelors (regardless of their nationality!) are what they are? Therefore (19) is false too.

I think that this argument is flawed because its premise according to which (20) is a correct translation of (19) assumes the so-called Langford-test for translation, according to which quoted material is not to be translated. But this assumption has been disputed by several authors (since Burge (1978b)).

The idea behind criticisms to the Langford-test is that quotations often make more than just referring to a word-shape type and that in those cases understanding of the quoted material is relevant to the understanding of the quotation itself. There are plenty of cases of this kind as so-called mixed quotation, hybrid quotation and direct discourse. For instance the correct German translation of (21) is (22):

(21)   John said to Jill 'I love you'

(22)   John sagte Jill 'Ich liebe dich'

The claim that (22) is the correct translation of (21) is supported by the ordinary practice of translation, and by the constraint on translation according to which good translation should preserve what is said by a sentence. In fact the more correct answer in German to a question concerning what someone said by uttering (21) seems to be:

(23)   Sie hat gesagt daß John sagte Jill 'Ich liebe dich'

Similarly it seems to me that the intuitively more correct report in German of what someone said by uttering (19) is

(24)   Sie hat gesagt daß jemand ist ein Jungeselle weil er ist ein unverheiratete Mann auf grund der Eigenschaften der Kompetenz auf '*Jungeselle*'

To appreciate this fact it is sufficient to think of (24) as an answer by a bilingual (German and English) speaker to a monolingual German speaker who asks what Mary said by uttering (19). Therefore the what is said-report test provides a reason to think that the more correct German translation of (19) is not (20) but (25)

(25)   Jemand ist ein Jungeselle weil er ist ein unverheiratete Mann auf grund der Eigenschaften der Kompetenz auf '*Jungeselle*'

The reasons why (25) is the correct translation of (19) are similar to those in virtue of which (22) is the correct translation of (21). In direct discourse reports quoted material gets translated because in this kind of discourse we are primarily interested in representing the utterances of other people, that is to say their tokening of words with their intended meanings, and meaning-properties are shared by expressions and their translations. So, in this kind of discourse, quotations refers not to mere shape-types but to more abstract types, which can be represented as the class of all expressions with the same meaning of the expression quoted.[33] The same is true of sentences like (19) since the features of 'bachelor' to which (19) point are

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[32] The objection runs in the same way for the truth-explanations.
[33] See Recanati (2001).

shared by all the words of other languages which are translations of it: these features are the inferential and referential aspects of the competence. So 'bachelor' in (19) must be interpreted as referring not to the shape-type but to the more abstract type which can be represented as the sets of all words, in whatever language, which share the relevant features which constitute the competence with them.

Another account of the fact that quoted material in direct discourse gets translated, which can be extended to the translation of sentences like (19), is to claim with Burge (1978b) that direct discourse carries with it an hidden self-referentiality either embedded in its semantics or in some pragmatic convention governing its use. For instance, if the first alternative (which is not the one Burge prefers) is chosen, (21) should be paraphrased as

(26)   John said to Jill 'I love you', *taken as a sentence of the language of this sentence*

Given this hidden self-referentiality, at the semantic or pragmatic level, the behaviour of direct-speech report in translation becomes a specific instance of the more general phenomenon that sometimes *preservation of self-reference* in translation matters more than preservation of reference.[34]

If one takes this route one can maintain the orthodox view according to which the quotation in (19) refers to an uninterpreted word-type but to point out that (19) is, semantically or pragmatically, hiddenly selfreferential and that therefore the proper understanding of it should be:

(27)   Someone is a bachelor because he is an unmarried man because of the features of the competence on 'bachelor' *understood as it is used in this very sentence*

Finally one may observe that in translating (19) the preservation of self-referentiality is to be preferred to the preservation of reference of the quotation, since a translation like (20), where reference of the quotation is preserved, loses, for a speaker of the target language, an important piece of information: that the asymmetry of 'because' in the explanatory sentence which is the explanandum in (19) stems from nothing but some use-properties of the expression occurring in it, use properties which it shares with the expressions of other languages which count as their translations, including the expressions he is actually using.

What could be objected against this line of argument is that it resists the translation-objection only conceding that metaphysical-a priori explanations are grounded, if not on facts involving only this or that language, on the generic existence of linguistic facts. But also this generic dependence seems to be false and this is stressed by the *contingency objection* which runs as follows.

Since I claim that TDB and, more generally, metaphysical-a priori explanations are grounded in facts involving linguistic competence, I'm committed to the truth of sentences like

(28)   It is true that snow is white because snow is white *because* some facts involving linguistic competence are thus and so.

But (28), as far as it is an explanatory claim, should support the counterfactual

(29)   Had it not been the case that the relevant facts involving linguistic competence are thus and so then it would not have been the case that it is true that snow is white because snow is white

But take a possible world which differs from our world just in that linguistic facts are different in it (for instance 'true' means something different or there are no speaking creatures). In this world, as in our world, snow is white; so the proposition that snow is white is true as evaluated at this world and it seems also to be true, at this world, that this proposition is true because snow is white. Therefore (29) is false and so (28) is also false.

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[34] Burge (1978b) stresses that preservation of self-reference in translation is common in translating text of metamathematics where the very starting point of some theorem (like Gödel's incompleteness theorem) is the construal of a self-referring sentence.

This is an instance of the general pattern of objection that is usually put forward against conventionalist or constructivist positions on specific subject matters (for instance modality, ontology, morality) according to which facts which seem to be language or mind independent are explained by facts that are mind or language dependent (as linguistic, social, or cognitive facts)[35]. Since TDB and in general metaphysical-a priori explanations, in their conditional form (as in schema (B)), are necessary truths the contingency objection is an instance of the objection raised against modal conventionalism, according to which modal conventionalism is committed either to the contradictory claim that what is necessary is not after all necessary (since it depends on contingent facts) or to the implausible negation of the principle of S4 system of modal logic according to which what is necessary (or possible) is necessarily so.[36]

My reply to this objection follows what recent conventionalists such as Einheuser (2006) and Sidelle (2009) have said concerning this general pattern of objections to conventionalism: the truth of explanations such as (28) does not involve the truth of the corresponding counterfactuals although there is some other kind of dependency between the facts to be explained and the facts by which the conventionalist want to explain them (in this case the facts involving linguistic competence with 'true'). As far as the first part of the reply is concerned consider again (8) and (9)

(8)   It is true that snow is white

(9)   Snow is white

(8) and (9) are true at the same possible worlds. Since what it takes for (9) to be true at a world is that snow be white in that world and since for snow to be white in a world no linguistic fact is needed, no such fact is needed in order for (8) to be true at a world. But, in virtue of how linguistic competence on (8) and (9) works, in order to as sentence such as

(10)   It is true that snow is white because snow is white

to be true at a world nothing more is needed than (8) (or (9)) be true at the same world, or to put it differently, the validity of the inference from (8) (or (9)) to (10) is guaranteed by the features of our linguistic competence on the relevant words. Therefore for (10) to be true at a world nothing more is needed than snow be white in that world, and in particular no speakers, no languages, no concepts. But that nothing else than snow being white is needed from the circumstance of evaluations in order that (10) be true at these circumstances does not entail that nothing else is needed in order that (10) be true at these circumstances: what is needed in fact need not exist *in* the circumstances at which (10) is evaluated. The reason for this is that what is needed are features of (8) and (9) which are related to the competence with them and that the truth-bearers which we evaluate *at* one circumstance need not exist *in* this circumstance.[37] It is important to remember from what I said in response to the translation-objection that the relevant features of (8) and (9) are shared by any sentence which counts as a translation of them and, in particular, by the sentences that we are using (in the meta-language) to describe the counterfactual situations at which (10) is evaluated.[38]

But, and we come to the second part of the reply to the objection, if this explanation of the truth of (10) does not entail a counterfactual dependence between the facts to be explained and the facts which explain them, which other kind of dependence is involved? After all an explanatory relation must involve some kind of dependency. Here the right thing to say is reminiscent of Kripke's (1980) considerations concerning counterfactual reasoning, in particular his claim that possible worlds are stipulated via counterfactual hypothesis whose content depends on the ways we actually use words. Starting from these kind of considerations one can claim that if possible worlds are scrutinized at all, they are always scrutinized with

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[35] Boghossian (1996) put forward this objection against what he calls the 'metaphysical' conception of analyticity, according to which there are sentences which are true simply by virtue of their meaning.

[36] I agree with Sidelle (2009) when he claims that to deny the principle of S4 is implausible because this is tantamount to claiming that what is necessary could have been false.

[37] On this see Iacona (2002).

[38] In the text object language and meta-language coincide (they are both English) but they could have been different.

the lens of the language we actually speak and, taking a step further, that our actual linguistic practices shape the space of possibilities themselves, so that if we had been engaged in other practices the set of possible worlds accessible to us would have been different.[39] *Given* the way in which we actually speak facts such as the fact that if it is true that snow is white this is true because snow is white and that whoever is a bachelor is so because he is an unmarried man are necessary and primitive facts, in the sense that there is no fact *in* the possible worlds at which these facts obtain which grounds them, and what our actual linguistic practices explain is just the necessity and primitiveness of these facts. Remember Nicola and imagine him asking again 'Why?', after his mother has said that bachelors are bachelors because they are unmarried man. Faced with this new request for an explanation the mother could repeat 'There is no "because" Nicola, bachelors are bachelors because they are unmarried man *because* "bachelor" means unmarried man (and not the other way around)'. This kind of answer would not be inconsistent since the first 'because' is the one which supports counterfactuals, and so that there is no 'because' entails that there is no counterfactual supporting explanation of the explanatory fact about which Nicola is asking since this is a primitive and necessary fact which covaries with nothing; on the other hand the second 'because' is the one which does not support counterfactuals since linguistic facts explain just this, the necessity and primitiveness of such facts, their being, so to say, brute, although trivial, explanatory facts.

I think that one root of both the translation and the contingency objection is the view about propositions according to which these are entities which are mind and language-independent: how can explanatory connections between propositions hold because of facts involving things like words and linguistic competence if propositions are ontologically independent of them?

My response to this is that I agree with those (like Iacona, 2002) who thinks that propositions are not mind and language independent entities in so far as their identity conditions can be stated just by reference to relations (for instance an *interpretation* relation) among the sentences which are embedded in the that-clause by which we refer to them. If propositions are identity dependent on sentences they inherit their features and their mutual relations from those of the corresponding sentences; so the priority of (9) in respect to (8) concerning linguistic competence grounds the relation of conceptual priority holding between the corresponding propositions and, by that, the explanatory asymmetry between them.

The third objection runs as follows. Metaphysical-a priori explanations seem to point to facts concerning some kind of asymmetrical metaphysical dependence, e.g., in the case of bachelorhood, the fact that the exemplification of the complex property is grounded in the exemplification in the proper way of the constituent properties; in the case of truth the fact that the truth of a proposition is grounded in the world being in a certain way. But how do these facts emerge from asymmetries which concern just our concepts or, as I claim, just the structure of our linguistic competence? As Liggins (2010) correctly observes, relations of relative conceptual simplicity and primitiveness do not always mirror relations of metaphysical priority. In a similar way, focusing on the importance I give to the inferential asymmetry between (8) and (9), it could be stressed that this involves taking sides with those who think that the 'because' in TDB is reason-giving instead of being really explanatory, where explanations, differently from inferences, track objective relations among facts.

The answer to these concerns is to point to the fact, highlighted in the previous paragraph, that properties like bachelorhood and truth are such that the linguistic practices governing the use of the corresponding predicates provide non revisable information concerning their internal structure and their exemplification-conditions. In these cases canonical reasons for ascribing the predicates count also as basic explanations of why the property is exemplified so what having a given property is an *inferential consequence* of (in Jenkins' (2008) words) counts also as an objective ground for having such a property, what having such a property is the *most immediate* objective consequence of. For the same reasons what Jenkins (2008) calls 'explication' of the concept is also an explanation of what it takes for something to have the corresponding property. In support of this claim it should be noted that the difference between reasons and explanations comes to the fore when there is space for divergence between the criteria by which one recognises the exemplification of a property and the objective conditions that must be satisfied for the property to be exemplified: but this happens just with properties like water not with properties like bachelorhood and truth.

The last objection is that my account reduces TDB to a question of horizontal inferential relations among truth-bearers misconceiving therefore its real content which points to a vertical relation of grounding holding

between the truth of what we say and believe and the way things are, a relation therefore not between truths and other truths but between truths and the world. My reply to this objection is twofold. In the first place the objection would be correct if one endorsed a globally inferentialist theory of meaning and of linguistic competence. If understanding words such as 'snow' and 'white' and the ability to use them were to involve just managing inferential connections among sentences, any theory that tried to explain the dependence of truth on being on the basis of the dependence of understanding of the truth predicate by understanding sentences to which the predicate is applied, would have difficulties counting as a justification of TDB. Luckily, as Marconi (1997) stresses, our linguistic competence with many words is not exhausted by inferential skills but also has a referential component, the ability to use the words in the right situations, and the ability to apply it to the right things. This is the reason why when we say that snow is white we say something which concerns real snow out there. But since that snow is white is what explains why it is true that snow is white, that real snow out there is white explains why it is true that snow is white. In the second place it should also be noted that TDB seems to be still in place, although perhaps in a weaker form, in so-called factual-defective discourses, where intuitions to the effect that our assertions are responsible to a language- and mind-independent reality decrease: if it is true that Carola is beautiful, this is true because she is beautiful. What becomes weaker in cases like this is not, I suggest, the intuition of the dependence of truth on being, but the intuition of the independence of being from our beliefs, desires, gustative and aesthetic reactions and so on.[40]

Conclusions

I hope to have vindicated the following claims: first, TDB is a commonsense truth; second, TDB is true in virtue of facts concerning the nature of our linguistic competence with the truth-predicate; third, a minimalist should feel perfectly at home with these facts since they are entailed by, or at least they are consistent with, Minimalism's central claim that MT is an implicit definition of the truth-predicate.[41]

So once the minimalist has proved that MT is indeed an implicit definition of truth he needn't do much more to explain why explanatory asymmetry is true. Provokingly he could say that TDB is true because MT is an implicit definition of truth; that is to say because Minimalism is true (if it is true at all).[42]

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[40] I became clear on this point thanks to a discussion with Andrea Strollo.

[41] Horwich (2009: 199f.) seems to agree.

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