

Minimalism And Truth

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Minimalism about truth has received considerable attention of late. We think that much of the discussion suffers from a pair of deficiencies. First, there has been a failure to discriminate different varieties and dimensions of minimalism about truth. Second, some serious and fundamental problems for the most popular varieties of minimalism about truth have not yet received sufficient attention. This paper aims to remedy those deficiencies.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, we distinguish six main varieties of minimalism about truth. In the second section, we identify four dimensions along which views about truth can be more or less minimal, thus clarifying the range of relevant notions of “minimality”. In the third section, we critically discuss four minimalist theses.

I. Varieties Of Minimalism About Truth

Many philosophers have been quick to endorse “a correspondence conception of truth” without being quite sure what they mean by it.¹ A similar problem besets another currently fashionable conception of truth which has its roots in Ramsey's seminal “Facts and Propositions”, the so-called “minimalist conception” or “deflationary theory” of truth.² In claiming that there is a problem here, we do not mean to suggest that there is no unity to the views in question. All minimalists think that to claim that it is true that snow is white is not to say something that is interestingly different from the claim that snow is white. And all minimalists think that truth is philosophically a good deal more boring than some philosophers have thought. But beyond that, the ideas that attract the title “minimalism” are

often interestingly different.

As the “snow is white” example makes vivid, almost all contemporary minimalism has in the background the idea that truth talk has a disquotational property.³ Put roughly, all minimalists endorse the truth-schema: “**P**” is true iff P.⁴ Of course, this is rough precisely because there is always an explicit or tacit presumption to the effect that the suitable substituends of “P” will be constrained somehow: consideration of indexicals and the paradoxes shows immediately that there is need for some constraints of this sort.⁵ Moreover, it has often been noted that endorsement of this schema is compatible with extremely robust conceptions of truth. The question is: what needs to be added to endorsement of the suitably qualified disquotational schema in order to get minimalism? We distinguish six classes of distinctively minimalist theses about truth. These classes are not all mutually exclusive; but we claim, albeit tentatively, that any minimalist view includes at least one thesis from one of these classes.

1. “is true” is not a significant predicate:

“is true” certainly looks like a significant predicate. However, there are a number of ways in which it can be denied that this is anything other than superficial appearance.

One such way is to offer a **performative** or **expressivist** account of the linguistic function of “is true”, e.g. via the claim that truth is merely a compliment we pay to those sentences which we are prepared to endorse.⁶ The most radical views of this kind would deny that claims involving the term “true” are, strictly speaking, assertions or expressions of belief, just as expressivists in ethics often deny that claims involving the term “good” are assertions or expressions of belief.

Another way to deny that “is true” is a significant predicate is to claim that it can always be eliminated by paraphrase or translation into deep structure -- i.e. into a structure

which reveals underlying grammatical or logical form. Such **redundancy -- elimination, disappearance** -- theories of truth can take various forms but share a common thread. The root idea is that when we assert something of the form “It is true that P”, we are not predicating something of a proposition or statement, but merely asserting that P. It is somewhat harder to make “true” disappear in other uses, particularly generalizations using “true”, e.g. “Everything the Pope says is true”. Even here, though, there are paraphrastic resources for the disappearance act provided by the literature: “is true” might be made to disappear by: (i) using substitutional or prosentential quantification to paraphrase “Everything the Pope says is true” as “For all P, if the Pope says P then P”, etc.⁷; or (ii) taking claims involving “is true” to be equivalent to various infinite disjunctions and/or conjunctions, so that “Everything the Pope says is true” is paraphrased as “If the Pope says grass is green, grass is green; and if the Pope says snow is white, snow is white; and if the Pope says there are bachelors with three hands, there are bachelors with three hands; and . . .”, etc.⁸

Yet another way -- though very different in kind -- of giving expression to the idea that “is true” is not a significant predicate might be thought to lie in the suggestion that truth is **immanent** to a language, i.e. that truth predicates have the form “true-in-L”, for particular languages L. It might be maintained -- and Tarski did maintain⁹ -- that “is true” simpliciter is not a significant predicate because it makes no sense; it is of course another question whether “is true in English” is a significant predicate. Indeed, it seems that Tarski held that “is true” can only be given content if it is read as elliptical for some predicate of the form “is true-in-L”, but that he also held that the predicate “is true-in-L” is by no means minimal, and, in particular, that it does act as a significant predicate.¹⁰

2. “is true” expresses a sub-standard property:

Even if “is true” does function as a predicate in the language, it may fail to belong to certain privileged classes of predicates, i.e. it may only express a “substandard property”. One possibility is that “is true” picks out a non-natural -- gerrymandered, gruesomely disjunctive -- property.¹¹ Another possibility is that “is true” picks out a non-explanatory, or at any rate non-systematically-explanatory property; i.e. that the predicate plays no explanatory role in a suitably mature systematic theory.¹² Moreover, these views could be combined with the view on which the function of “is true” is to allow the expression of certain kinds of infinite disjunctions and conjunctions of sentences; for it could be held that the infinitely disjunctive or conjunctive properties which are thereby expressed are gruesome and/or not fit to find an explanatory place in our best systematic theories.¹³

(Perhaps it is worth noting here that even if “is true” does function as a predicate in the language, and even if it is not the case that it turns out to be a non-privileged predicate, it may be that “is true” fails to have some of the philosophically interesting features which some philosophers have associated with the property which it expresses. Although it is hard to say exactly what philosophically interesting features are at issue here, there are certain slogans and labels which may provide hints: “truth is not mind-independent”, “truth is not evidence-transcendent”, “truth is not a matter of correspondence to the facts”, “truth is just a matter of convergence in an ideal limit”.

A number of distinct issues arise which we must be careful not to muddle together. One sort of issue concerns the question: “What does one need to know in order to grasp the meaning of ‘is true’?”, and the related question: “What are the components of the concept of truth?” In connection with this sort of question, we can ask, for example, whether one needs to know that truth is evidence-transcendent in order to count as grasping the content of “is true”. But there is a further sort of question, namely, “What sorts of features are enjoyed by the property picked out by ‘is true’?”. This question cannot be assimilated to the first. For example, even granting that it is not part of the concept of truth that truth is evidence-

transcendent, it might also not be part of the concept of truth that truth is not evidence-transcendent. If that is right, an adequate account of the concept of truth might leave open the question whether the property picked out by “is true” is evidence transcendent. Having distinguished these questions, we can see that truth might be a property with various robust features even though the concept of truth does not carry within it a commitment to those robust features.)

3. “is true” has no super sense

Consider all the claims that are true in the ordinary sense of “is true”. Some philosophers have supposed that within this class, there is a subset to which a robust notion of CORRESPONDENCE TRUTH can apply. For example, some have insisted on distinguishing **truth by convention**, or **truth by meaning**, or **analytic truth** -- where it is supposed that truths by convention are not about the world -- and **truth by correspondence to fact**, or **truth in virtue of the world**, or **synthetic truth**.^{14 15} Others have apparently held that there is a distinction between the “objective truths” and the other truths.¹⁶ And yet others have thought that there is a distinction between what is “true” in the primary, correspondence sense and what is true in some derivative sense, intimating some sort of pros hen semantics for truth.¹⁷

The reading of Ancient Scepticism in Frede (1987) provides another ready target for the sort of minimalism we are considering. As Frede understands Sextus and others, the sceptics did not aim to cease believing anything in the ordinary sense of “believing”. Rather the sceptics held that to believe that p in the ordinary sense is not yet to believe that p’s obtaining is in the true nature of things. Here we have a sense of truth that is radically non-disquotational: Frede's sceptics do not accept that **P iff the obtaining of the state of affairs that P is in the true nature of things**. Here is a representative passage:

What is at issue is not whether or not Socrates died in 399, but whether it is appropriate, given the true nature of things, whether it correctly mirrors reality, to speak of Socrates' having died in 399. . . it might be that, given the true nature of things, it is inappropriate to speak of persons and times. Yet, even if someone believed this, that would not mean that he could not continue to think and say that Socrates died in 399; and there is no reason to suppose that his belief would differ from anyone else's who believes that Socrates died in 399. Thus, there is a perfectly good sense in which someone who suspends judgement about how things really are can have beliefs about how things are.¹⁸

Bearing in mind the putative contrast between “believing how things are” and “believing how things really are” Frede's sceptics provide the perfect opponent for the much cited deflationism about truth of Fine (1984), since the main point of Fine's position seems to be to deny the super-sense of truth connoted by “really”:

What then of the realist, what does he add to his core acceptance of the results of science as really true? My colleague, Charles Chastain, suggested, what I think is the most graphic way of stating the answer -- namely, that what the realist goes in for is a desk-thumping, foot-stamping shout of “Really!” . . . [T]he homely line makes the core position, all by itself, a compelling one.¹⁹

The core position, labelled by Fine “the Natural Ontological Attitude” turns out to be, then, equivalent to the denial of a super sense. Sceptics needed a supersense to suspend judgment about. Kant needed a supersense to be idealist about. The dogmatic opponents of Kant and the sceptics needed a supersense to be dogmatic about. Fine's idea is that once we abandon a super-sense many realist-anti-realist disputes will lapse into vacuity.²⁰

It should be noted that defenders of a “super-sense” view of truth for particular areas of discourse might also avail themselves of some version of minimalism with respect to a generic kind of truth. For example, a theorist who selectively deploys some robust notion of facthood might claim that there is a core, generic, sense of “is true” which is lightweight;

indeed, this is the strategy of Wright (1992).

4. “is true” has a thin conceptual role:

There are further candidate senses -- apart from the idea that truth is a less-than-fully-robust property -- in which truth can be minimal even if “is true” does function as a predicate in the language, and even if there is no tenable notion of “substandard property” according to which truth comes out as substandard. One such candidate is that “is true” has a thin conceptual role: on this view, mere possession of the concept truth contributes little or nothing to our grasp of other central semantic and psychological notions and contributes little or nothing to our understanding of the structure of reality and our relationship to it. The most radical version of this thesis will maintain that our grasp of other central cognitive concepts -- belief, assertion, meaning, proposition, statement, translation, synonymy, fact, declarative sentence, negation, propositional connective, deep structure, logical form, semantics, etc. -- is never to be explained in terms of our possession of the concept of truth; it will maintain further that deployment of the concept truth does not, in and of itself, immediately commit us a priori to any interesting metaphysical theses.

The “thin conceptual role” assigned to “is true” may include one or more of: being a device for expressing various generalities; having certain useful pragmatic features -- for example, having to do with implicatures about originality²¹, encouraging debate, discouraging no-fault disagreements;²² etc. The reader will notice that these ideas coincide with some of the themes voiced under subheading “1” above; but of course, a thin conceptual role view is not always, and need not be, accompanied by either the idea that “is true” is not a grammatical predicate or by the idea that “truth” talk is, strictly speaking, non-assertoric.

A “thin conceptual role” view might concede that there are some platitudes in which both the term “true” and some central cognitive notion figures, e.g. that belief is a

commitment to truth. But this view will deny that possession of the central cognitive notions is to be explained in terms of such platitudes. Analogy: the term “man” figures in the platitude “Bachelors are unmarried men”, but grasping the concept man does not consist inter alia in grasping that platitude. At least normally, that platitude may help introduce us to the concept bachelor, but not to the concept man: there is simply no question that one can know what a man is without knowing what a bachelor is; but there is clearly a question whether one can know what a bachelor is without knowing what a man is. Similarly, the most radical “thin conceptual role” theorist will insist that while the platitude “Belief is commitment to truth” might perhaps, help to introduce us to -- or partially constitute our understanding of -- the concept truth, it does not help to introduce us -- or partially constitute our understanding of -- the concept belief.

Is the “thin conceptual role” view a view about the role that the concept of truth actually plays or the role that it ought to play? Again, as our purpose is taxonomy, we can allow for both varieties. One might hold that as things stand, the concept of truth has a thick role but that it ought to be purged of its thickness by adopting a theory with a “thin” truth predicate; or, instead, one might hold that even as things now stand, “is true” plays only a “thin” role in our conceptual scheme. A version of the first view would insist that our current notion of meaning, as things now stand, is that of a truth condition, a notion that is intertwined with our notion of truth and, and by endorsing a “thin” conception of truth would require us to abandon our current notion of meaning²³; the second view would insist that our current notion of meaning is not, even in part, grounded upon our notion of truth.

Worries may arise about the talk of “conceptual roles” in the preceding paragraphs. In particular, it may be alleged that this way of talking helps itself to some kind of anti-holistic analysis of language content. Indeed it does. But it is not clear that every version of minimalism about truth can be stated without the resources of an anti-holistic analysis of language. After all, one central issue is about the content of the truth predicate: but on holistic

accounts of language, there is no separable content which can be assigned to the truth predicate, and no clear sense to be made of the idea that the content of certain predicative expressions is exhausted by certain roles.

5. “is true” expresses a property with no hidden essence:

Even if “is true” does function as a predicate in the language, and even “true” enjoys an explanatory role in good systematic theories, and even if “is true” does not have a thin conceptual role, there is still a further sense in which truth could be minimal, viz. that “is true” expresses a property which has no hidden essence. In traditional terminology, “is true” might have a nominal definition²⁴, but no real definition; in more modern parlance, the nature of the property of truth might be exhausted analytically, without any a posteriori, or synthetic a priori, contribution. Clearly, the view that truth has no real essence has a natural alliance with some versions of the “truth is not a natural property” view; for if truth were an extremely gerrymandered property, that would certainly deter one from using the language of “real essence” and “real definition” in connection with it.

Views which deny that “is true” is a significant predicate are often committed to the view that there is no further essence to truth which the deflating analysis fails to capture. But of course one might concede that “is true” is a significant predicate while yet denying that “is true” has a real definition.

We wish to emphasise that “thin conceptual role” and “no hidden essence” are independent factors; it could be that “is true” has one, or both, or neither. Often, those who claim to be minimalists seem to want both, but without explicitly realising that there are two distinct claims to be made.²⁵ On the face of it, the thin conceptual role view is perfectly compatible with the claim that truth has a hidden essence.²⁶

What might a hidden essence view of truth look like? We offer a couple of examples,

the first a rough gloss on Armstrong, the second on Lewis, though faithfulness to their views on truth is not our primary goal²⁷: (a) For each true claim, there is an element of being -- a STATE OF AFFAIRS -- whose structure is not typically revealed by the claim itself. This element of being stands in the fundamental relation of TRUTHMAKING to the true claim, though it will stand in the fundamental relation of FALSEMAKING to other claims.²⁸ (b) Each true claim stands in the relation EXPRESSING to a set of distinct spatio-temporal concrete universes and is itself made in some universe -- and, of course, actual claims are made at the actual universe. A claim has the property TRUE just in case the universe at which the claim is uttered is a member of the set of universes that the claim expresses.²⁹

6. Folk practice rules

A strand of thought common to many deflationist/minimalist conceptions of truth -- though certainly not all -- is that there is nothing worth saying about truth beyond what is already there in folk practice. A radical version of this view, inspired by Wittgenstein, is strongly anti-theory: the philosophical project of a theory of truth, or a theory of the content of "is true", etc. is deeply wrong headed; instead, folk practice should simply be taken at face value.

An alternative pro-folk approach combines a profound respect for folk practice with a more positive attitude to philosophy: for a clearly theoretical conception of the truth-predicate may be produced if one supposes that it can be given an exhaustive analysis in the style of the Ramsey-Carnap-Lewis analysis of theoretical terms.³⁰ The basic idea is that an analysis of the truth predicate can be extracted from the collection of all the platitudes -- semantic and non-semantic -- about truth. Variations arise according to different conceptions of the platitudes involved. On one view, the platitudes are directly and securely embedded in ordinary practice. On another view, the platitudes are given by a procedure which begins with pre-theoretical intuition and aims for reflective equilibrium under the guide of broad theoretical desiderata:

naturalness, simplicity, width, etc.³¹ There may be other variations as well. On any such view, the folk platitudes that tell the truth about truth -- or at least the one's that survive some modest selection criteria -- will be treated as unassailable in the following way: if there is truth at all, then there is a non-negotiable story about truth that is implicit in folk practice. On this conception, philosophers cannot legitimately maintain that there is truth and yet contest the deliverances of folk practice, suitably Ramsified.³²

II. Dimensions Of Minimalism About Truth

Given the variety of views which have gone under the label “minimalism about truth”, it should not be surprising that different criteria for minimality are appropriate for different views. We shall now distinguish four different dimensions along which minimality about any topic can be assessed.

1. Revision of folk practice:

One way in which an account can be minimal is that it leads to minimal change to current practice, or standard practice. In the context of discussion of truth, the likely candidate for “current practice” or “standard practice” is ordinary folk practice. Hence -- by a sympathetic extension of terminology -- one way that an account of truth can be minimal is that it captures the more-or-less unreconstructed practice of the folk. More specifically, an account of truth is minimalist on this dimension, if it enjoins minimal **revisions** to folk practice, or that it enjoins minimal **additions** to folk practice, or both.³³ Some of the views included in our above list count as minimal along this dimension while others do not. For example, Ramsey-Carnap-Lewis-style analyses of “is true” tend to be minimal about revisions, while “no hidden essence” views tend to be minimal about additions. Meanwhile, views according to which we

ought to adopt a minimalist conception of truth may explicitly endorse considerable revision of folk practice.³⁴ However, the status of most views is controversial: it is a matter for dispute, for example, whether a prosentential conception of truth counts as a significant revision to folk practice.

A perhaps related way in which an account of truth can be minimal is that it has minimal **controversial** commitments -- i.e. that it does not have commitments which are in dispute amongst parties to the debate about truth. Again, many accounts of truth on our list are not minimalist along this dimension. For example, some redundancy analyses of truth are grounded on the assumption that there can be an adequate analysis of, or surrogate for, meaning in terms of conceptual role and indications conditions³⁵ or assertability conditions³⁶. More generally, many analyses of this kind are grounded in a commitment to naturalism or physicalism -- and hence, in the sense now at issue, are decidedly not minimal.

2. Causal/Explanatory Role:

A second way in which an account of truth can be minimal is that it gives a minimal -- perhaps even no -- **causal** or **explanatory** role to truth in the canonical formulations of theories. Thus, for example, accounts which allow truth a role in some canonical explanation of the success of science do not count as fully minimal in this dimension. Nor do accounts which give truth a central role in the explanation of the nature of content, i.e. those which take the orthodox equation of content with truth-conditions seriously. On the other hand, some views which analyse truth in terms of a very restricted set of platitudes -- e.g. those pertaining to syntactic discipline -- are minimal in this sense; and so are pure versions of the view that "is true" is not a significant predicate. Explicit notice should be taken of the fact that there is room in conceptual space for the view that truth is explanatory but not causally explanatory. After all, recalling Aristotle's schedule of causes, one might insist either: (i) that, as

maintained by various ancients and medievals, truth is a final cause -- the end of cognition, say; or else (ii) that truth is a formal cause -- say, in defining what makes some mental a belief and in defining what makes some linguistic state an assertion -- without giving truth a significant role to play as an efficient cause.

3. Conceptual Role

A dimension related to the last concerns the thinness or thickness of the conceptual role assigned to truth. How much does our understanding of various aspects of our conceptual scheme depend on our grasping the concept of truth? Does the making of any judgments at all require possession of the concept truth, as the Fregean idea of judgment -- as advancement from a thought to a truth value -- might suggest? Does a grasp of logical laws depend upon possession of the concept of truth? Does a grasp of some, or all, of the central concepts of folk psychology and/or folk linguistics depend upon possession of the concept of truth? Does a grasp of various interesting metaphysical theses -- such as realism, in its various guises -- depend upon a grasp of the notion of truth? Etc.

Not all of the views listed in section I will be minimalist along the dimension of width of conceptual role. We offer two examples. First, a view that is minimalist with regard to changing folk practice need not be minimalist along the dimension of width of conceptual role: a proponent of the Ramsey-Lewis-Carnap approach might insist on no more than minimal changes to folk practice and yet have no truck with the idea that the conceptual role of truth within folk practice is thin. Second, a view that denies a supersense to "true" need not be minimalist along the dimension of width of conceptual role -- after all, even granting that there is no supersense of truth, the workaday notion of truth may nevertheless have a thick conceptual role.

4. Commitments:

A fourth way in which an account of truth can be minimal is that it has minimal commitments, i.e. either that it has minimal **ontological** commitments, or that it has minimal **ideological** commitments, or that it has minimal **theoretical** commitments, where the last is determined by some appropriate weighting of the first two. Examples of theories which fail to have minimal ontological commitments are those which require a role for infinite conjunctions and disjunctions of sentences -- a role disqualified by finitistic or intuitionistic or merely potentially infinitistic ontologies -- and perhaps those which require roles for sentence types, properties, relations, propositions and the like -- roles disqualified by nominalism, though perhaps replaced by other expensive ontological investments, e.g. in concrete possible worlds. Examples of theories which fail to have minimal ideological commitments include those which introduce new primitives -- fancy prosentential quantifiers, for example -- to translate sentences involving the truth predicate; and those which introduce new SUPER senses for the truth predicate. Some of the items on our list in section I may turn out to have rather robust ontological commitments, or ideological commitments, or both. For example, one of our “minimalisms” depended for its description on a distinction between natural and non-natural properties, and thus involved a significant commitment both to properties (ontology) and to a significant dichotomy among them (ideology). Other items on the list require distinctions between: (a) apparent predicates and genuine predicates; (b) predicates that express properties and those that don't; (c) predicates that figure in commonplace explanations and ones that are genuinely explanatory; and so on. These distinctions all carry with them significant theoretical commitments. The lesson is that many of the views that are paraded as minimalisms about truth certainly require significant, and often disputed, theoretical commitments for their articulation.³⁷

Clearly, questions about the costs of theoretical commitments are very controversial.

Theory choice is often a matter of trading ontological commitments for ideological commitments -- e.g. concrete possible worlds for modal primitives -- and vice versa. Moreover, what matter are the properties of the global views which ensue: it is overall commitments which one seeks to minimise, not necessarily commitments in particular areas. We won't be attempting to conduct an exhaustive survey of the extent of the theoretical commitments of the views described in section I; in any case, in the light of the previous paragraph we are dubious about the significance of local minimality viz a viz truth on this dimension.

A concluding observation:

It is common to hear people expressing a desire to be not merely minimalist about truth but, moreover minimalist across the board. Can we make sense of minimalism across the board? Well, its hard to make sense of minimalism across the board in terms of dimensions 2 and 3. If truth is to be relegated from explanatory significance, other concepts will inevitably be accorded explanatory importance. If truth is to be according a thin conceptual role, other concepts will surely be accorded a thick one. Dimensions 1 and 4 offer more promising ways of at least making sense of minimalism simpliciter. One might try, across the board to enjoin as little change to folk practice as possible (dimension 1). And one might try, across the board to minimize one's theoretical commitments (dimension 4) . Moreover, we insist that there is an important point to be made here against those who claim some methodologically privileged position for minimalism about truth; for, in point of revision of ordinary practice and weight of global theoretical commitments, it is far from clear that every minimalism about truth is especially privileged.³⁸ Consider, e.g., the “methodological deflationism” espoused in Field (1994): this is far from minimalist along the dimension of departure from folk practice; and -- in view of the underlying physicalistic assumptions -- it is, at the very least, highly

contentious to claim that it is minimalist along the dimension of theoretical commitments.

III. Four Minimalist Theses Examined

The conceptual territory that we have examined is messy to say the least. An exhaustive examination of all the various guises of minimalism about truth is beyond the scope of this paper. In what follows, we address four of the minimalist theses discussed above, and strive to bring some clarity to the issues which they raise. These theses are: (1) the “no super sense” thesis; (2) the “thin explanatory role” thesis; (3) the “thin conceptual role” thesis; and (4) the “no hidden essence” thesis.³⁹

(1) The “No Super Sense” Thesis.

As we have noted, some minimalists subscribe to a sort of equivalence thesis according to which, to the extent that such expressions as “‘P’ corresponds to the facts”, “‘P’ fits reality”, “‘P’ is made true by the world” are intelligible at all, then they are equivalent to “‘P’ is true” in ordinary English. Couple this with the disquotational schema and we get the following schema: **P iff “P” is true iff “P” corresponds to reality iff “P” is made true by the world iff ...** . The “no super sense” theory claims that, if one has entertained the question whether P and come to a decision, there is no interesting further sorting procedure to be undertaken concerning whether “P” is true, “P” corresponds to reality and so on.

The “no super sense” thesis is, as far as we can tell, very much orthodoxy in contemporary analytic philosophy: the analytic/synthetic distinction is with us -- but, despite the precedent provided by the logical positivists, it is rarely glossed as a distinction between senses of “true”; and the rhetoric of correspondence is also very much with us -- but this is almost never glossed as a species of truth in the ordinary sense. Furthermore, the “no super

sense” thesis strikes us as the most compelling out of those that we examine in this section of the paper. What we wish to urge is that it not be conflated with other minimalist theses: it does not by itself entail, for example that truth has no hidden essence, nor that truth has a thin conceptual role. The reader will be helped from collapsing this sort of minimalism into others by reminding herself that not every English sentence can be inserted into the above schema. Those who endorse that schema do not mean thereby to be endorsing such “claims” as:

Shut the door iff “Shut the door” is true iff “Shut the door” corresponds to reality . . .

So, granting that schema, there is a substantive issue as to which claims can be plugged into that schema. For all the schema says, we may need the concept corresponds to reality in order to grasp the correct range of substituends: more generally, the schema says nothing about the conceptual resources required to delimit the class of suitable substituends of “P”. This shows that the schema does not, by itself, enjoin a “thin conceptual role” thesis. Nor does the schema, by itself, tell us that “corresponds to reality” has no real definition. For example, it is quite compatible with the above schema that (a) the only fit substituents of “P” are the sorts of things that could in principle be believed or disbelieved and (b) it is in the nature of belief that it aims towards certain property P with real definition R, where P is CORRESPONDENCE WITH REALITY.⁴⁰

In sum, we suggest that the “No Super Sense” thesis has some plausibility, but its implications should not be overstated. Moreover, we suggest, albeit tentatively, that some of the minimalist themes alluded to earlier may actually tell against the “no super sense” thesis. E.g., suppose that the only function of the “ordinary sense” of truth is as a device for generality, and that “assertion” and “belief”, in the ordinary sense, can be understood without relying on the ordinary sense of 'truth' or any other sense of “truth”. Suppose further that one is confronted by assertions to the effect that such and such is “cool”⁴¹ -- in the colloquial (American) sense -- assertions and expressions of belief by the lights of one's explication of assertion and belief. One can't then say that use of the ordinary “true” is illegitimate for, ex

hypothesi, it is merely a device for generalizing. Suppose that most “cool” talkers nevertheless find it compelling to say that there is no ultimate right and wrong about “cool” talk. Then either one will have to abandon that compulsion as ill-founded, or else one will have to admit a super sense of right: for, given the “thin” role assigned to the ordinary sense, one’s view that there is no “ultimate right and wrong” cannot be assimilated to the ordinary sense. Unless, then, one has a theory of assertion and belief according to which cool-talk is not really assertoric or belief-expressing, then, given a thin account of the ordinary sense of “true”, one will feel pressure to introducing a “super-sense”. We see this pressure in Quine’s work. Quine assigns a thin role to the ordinary truth predicate, according to which it is merely a device for generalizing “along a dimension that cannot be swept out by a general term”.⁴² He also hold that there are discourses which we have inevitable recourse which do not “limn the truth”. Given that we have the same need for generality in those other discourses too, there is considerable pressure here to introduce a super-sense of “truth”.

(2) The Thin Explanatory Role Thesis.

It is worth distinguishing two ways -- which have not always been distinguished -- in which the thin explanatory role thesis gets played out. One way involves dismissal of putative explanations involving truth as poor explanations. The other way involves paraphrase of putative explanations with expressions which deploy prosentential or substitutional quantification.

Consider the following explanations involving truth:

1. The claim “There are electrons” has proven useful to scientists because it is true that there are electrons.
2. Science commands increasing respect because it converges upon the truth.
3. I admire Kripke because most of what he says is true.

The first strategy will say these are bad explanations, and that much better explanations are given by, say:

- 1a. The claim that there are electrons has proven useful to scientists because that claim has contributed to the empirical adequacy of theories in which it is embedded.
- 2a. Science commands increasing respect because its theory are increasingly empirically adequate.
- 3a. I admire Kripke because I find myself agreeing with most of what he says.

The second strategy will provide the following sorts of paraphrases:

- 1b. The claim "There are electrons" has proven useful to scientists because there are electrons.
- 2b. Science commands increasing respect because, increasingly, for all claims that P, if scientists accept theories according to which P, then P.
- 3b. I admire Kripke because for most P, if Kripke says that P, then P.

We have two worries about the first strategy.

First, it seems to set extremely high standards for what counts as legitimate explanation. As many philosophers have noted, it is a contextually variable and somewhat pragmatic matter what counts as an appropriate explanation for what. Even if appeal to, say, empirical adequacy were an acceptable explanation of certain phenomena, that would not exclude the acceptable invocation of truth as an explanatory property at least in certain contexts. Suppose, for example, that science is converging on the truth. Must it be simply illegitimate to explain the success of science in terms of this convergence, no matter what the context? Granted, we can imagine that science succeeds without the convergence. But that no more rules out explaining success in terms of convergence than the imaginability of successful negotiation with environment without evolutionary adaption shows that successful negotiation with environment can't be explained by appeal to evolutionary adaptation. Bald claims about the non-explanatory value of truth are normally accompanied by little more than

a few examples of the sort provided above. What we need is a theory of explanation which sets clear standards of explanatoriness and which provides some general account of why it is that truth cannot meet those standards.

And what if the truth predicate does not express a property at all, as some minimalists have maintained -- for then, a fortiori, the truth predicate will fail to express an explanatory property? A comprehensive discussion of this suggestion would require a painstaking examination of the different possible things which one might mean by "property"; the reader will be relieved to know that we shall not try to undertake this task here. Instead the following brief observation will suffice for present purposes: It is easy to see that there is a class corresponding to the predicate "is true": the claim "Snow is white" belongs to the class if snow is white, and so on.⁴³ Consider that class. It appears that it can do explanatory work: see 1-3 above. Perhaps there is some useful conception of "property" according to which that class doesn't count as a property, or has no property corresponding to it. But so long as the truth class is explanatory, it is going to be neither here nor there -- as far as the question whether truth is explanatory goes -- whether or not truth counts as a property.

Second, the notions used in the replacement explanation often themselves appear to rely on truth. For example, the notion of "empirical adequacy" is most naturally glossed as "truth of observational claims". But then it can hardly be an objection to other kinds of explanations that they involve truth.

We don't offer these remarks as decisive. We do know of one, albeit very radical way of resisting the claim that truth is explanatory, viz. to deny that various theories are true or false simpliciter, insisting instead that they are true or false relative to an interpretation. This is of course Quine's position, and it has been taken on board recently by Field (1994). What we don't know of is any less radical way of denying the explanatory value of truth.

Turning to the second strategy, we begin with the following prima facie worry: If the claims 1-3 are equivalent to the claims 1b-3b, and 1b-3b are explanatory, then doesn't that

show that 1-3 are explanatory? And doesn't that then show that truth is an explanatory property? The only response we can think of is to say that while claims using the predicate "is true" are explanatory, it is nevertheless false to say that truth is an explanatory property. Once again, we wish to register two worries for potential justifications of this response. First, the response again sets very high standards on what counts as explanatory. One would normally say that a property is explanatory if claims deploying a predicate expressing that property have explanatory value. The view we are considering requires standards higher than that, standards which need to be explained and justified. Second, we worry that the use of paraphrase in order to show that "is true" does not express an explanatory property is grounded in the following idea: one can show that "is true" is not explanatory by providing paraphrases of the explanations in which "is true" figures in which no predicates corresponding to "is true" appear. If this is the reason for denying that "is true" is explanatory, it is a bad one. For similar rhetoric can be used against the idea that propositional quantifiers can be explanatory: one can 'show' that propositional quantifiers are not explanatory by providing paraphrases of propositional quantification explanations into claims that employ only objectual quantification of the sort enjoined by Quine's canonical notion. The situation is symmetrical. Presuming that we can make sense of propositional quantification, the right thing to say is that a certain explanatory job can be accomplished by a variety of ideologies: by objectual quantification together with a truth predicate, or by propositional quantification. The possibility of using a variety of ideologies to do this explanatory job does not, however, show that any one of those ideologies is non-explanatory.

In sum, it strikes us that, at best, plenty of work needs to be done if the conclusion that 'truth' is not an explanatory property is to be secured. We end with a final thought, somewhat more sympathetic to the minimalist cause. Where truth is invoked in quasi-causal contexts, what is being explained is always the activities of thinking beings. The truth of a theory or a claim cannot, it seems, be invoked in causal explanation of some non-mentalistic phenomenon

without thinking beings serving as tacit or explicit intermediaries. This connects up with a notion of explanatory width registered by Wright (1992:196):

Let the width of cosmological role of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things other than, or other than via, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object.

Perhaps there is a case to be made here for the claim that truth has a relatively narrow explanatory role along these sorts of lines.⁴⁴ But more radical claims about the non-explanatoriness of truth seem far harder to justify.

The “Thin Conceptual Role” Thesis

Put most broadly, the central problem for the “thin conceptual role thesis” concerns the **expressive resources** of a language with a merely minimal truth predicate. For those views which hold that the truth predicate has a thin conceptual role, this worry may take two particular forms, viz: (i) does the view have sufficient resources to draw certain distinctions which are crucial to the expression of the view -- e.g. declarative vs. non-declarative, semantic vs. pragmatic, minimalist vs. non-minimalist?; and (ii) does the view have sufficient resources to accommodate a range of concepts that are ordinarily thought to be understood, in part, thanks to the concept of truth: meaning, assertion, belief, fact, proposition, statement, translation, synonym, deep structure, logical form, negation, the role (function) of a linguistic item, the point of a linguistic item?

One expression of the first kind of worry is given in arguments which purport to show that minimalist conceptions of truth are unstable⁴⁵. Here, the idea is that the very attempt to draw a certain kind of line -- e.g. the line between minimal and non-minimal concepts -- requires the employment of a non-minimal concept of truth, or, at any rate, the employment

of something which relies upon a non-minimal conception of truth. It is not clear that these arguments must succeed; for it is not clear that a minimalist account of truth is incompatible with, e.g., a non-minimalist account of some other core cognitive notion -- assertion, belief, etc. -- which can be used to ground the controversial distinction. However, even if these arguments fail, there is a closely related worry which remains, viz. whether one can give an account of the importance or significance of the distinction thus drawn which does not rely upon a non-minimal conception of truth. Moreover, we have already noted one minimalist story that suffers on both these counts: Quine's minimalism seems unstable, since it is hard to see how he can square his claim, that certain families of sentences that we do assent to -- and will carry on assenting to -- don't "limn the truth", with a minimalism according to which any discourse to which we assent can usefully enjoy a truth predicate for the purpose of generality. And Quine's minimalism seems hard to square with the significance that Quine attaches to his view that certain discourses don't limn the truth.

We are far from certain that all "thin conceptual role" accounts of truth will turn out unstable in this way. But, turning now to the second sort of worry, we think it hard to see how our understanding of the broad range of semantic, psychological, linguistic and logical concepts can be accounted for without appeal to the concept of truth. We shall focus on three examples in which this problem arises: **negation**, **fugitive propositions**, and **truth-aptness**.

(a) **Negation**: Can we get a handle on the concept of negation without that handle relying on the notions of truth and falsity? Horwich (1990:74) is aware of this sort of challenge:

As for the word "not", it is traditionally supposed that the best way to define both it and the other logical constants is by means of truth tables. . . . But from the perspective of minimalism, this strategy is no good.

He suggests that:

A complete account of the meaning of the English word "not" must contain

fundamental facts about its proper use that are sufficient to account for our entire employment of the term. Such basic rules of use might well include: (a) the assertability of the theorems of deductive logic . . . (b) the principle that one never assert both “a is F” and “a is not F” and (c) the rule that, in the application of an observation predicate “O” to a perceptible object, x, if “x is O” is not assertible then “x is not O” is assertible.⁴⁶

It is useful to reflect on this use-oriented approach in the light of the statement of the alleged problem for minimalism in Dummett (1978:5f.):

In logical symbolism there exists a sign which, put in front of a sentence, forms the negation of that sentence; but in natural language we do not have such a sign. We have to think to realise that the negation of “No one is here” is not “No one is not here” but “Someone is here”; there is no one rule for forming the negation of a given sentence. Now according to what principle do we recognise one sentence as the negation of another? It is natural to answer: The negation of a sentence P is that sentence which is true if and only if P is false and false if and only if P is true. But this explanation is ruled out if we want to use the notion of the negation of a sentence in order to explain the sense of the word “false” .

An important point that Dummett recognizes is that the task of giving an account of our notion of the negation of a sentence is not the task of giving an account of the English word “not”. Our practice has at its conceptual roots a notion of logical incompatibility. That is what our proper focus ought to be on. The thin conceptual role theorist can hardly deny that there is a notion of logical incompatibility that guides our practice. The primary issue is not how to explain the English word “not”, but to explain what our grip on the basic notion of logical incompatibility consists in if it is not, as the minimalist must say, dependent on our notions of truth and falsity. As far as we discern, Horwich's discussion suggests that the ground of our notion of incompatibility is in the notion of “can't be asserted at the same time”. Can it be

maintained that this is the most primitive notion upon which the notion of logical incompatibility is derived? No; the view is indefensible. The claims “I believe that P” and “Not P” are not coassertable; but this is not because they are logically incompatible. There are a number of sources of non-coassertability, only one of which is logical incompatibility. In general, the assertability oriented approach obscures altogether the semantic/pragmatic distinction. Austin (1950) pointed out long ago that the sentence “There is an elephant in this room” is not assertible by ordinary people in their living rooms. Once it is recognized that a claim may fail in that sort of way -- for pragmatic reasons -- to be assertable, then one ought to give up on the idea of accounting for basic semantic notions such as logical incompatibility in terms of assertability, coassertability and so on.⁴⁷

(b) **Fugitive Propositions**: Our second example concerns the following claim: there are propositions that no language user -- and perhaps no possible language user -- is capable of grasping. Some putative instances of these fugitive propositions are given in the following cases: (i) Take the conjunction of all the empirical truths past present and future. It is certainly arguable that no language user is capable of giving voice to that conjunction. (ii) Consider all the truths about what it is like to be a butterfly. Butterflies, lacking a language, cannot express those truths. Language users, having qualia significantly different to butterflies, cannot express them either. (iii) Take the conjunction of all the truths about the power set of real numbers . . .

If we accept some of these examples, and the realism that goes with them, we will be forced to admit the existence of propositions, where propositions are not thought of as utterances or classes of utterances. The “thin conceptual role” theorist will either have to quarrel with the claim that there are proposition that language users are incapable of grasping, or else claim that we can get a handle on the notion of an ungraspable proposition independently of the notion of truth and falsity. Minimalists have rarely seen the force of this problem. Certainly they rarely have explicitly embraced the sort of anti-realist concession that

goes with the rejection of all our examples. It's beyond our purview to discuss any such anti-realism directly. We merely invite minimalists to be up front about this anti-realism if indeed they wish to acquiesce in it. Further, since this sort of anti-realism strikes us as revisionary, minimalists who acquiesce in such anti-realism should admit that, for all they have said, the ordinary notion of truth is non-minimal. What of the second route -- providing an account of the notion of an ungraspable proposition independently of the notion of truth or falsity? We confess to not finding this very plausible. Such an account will have to give some sort of principle of individuation for ungraspable propositions. The most natural criteria will inevitably involve truth and falsity. For it seems compelling to think that part of the story about what individuates propositions is this: the proposition that p cannot be identical to the proposition that q unless they are true under exactly the same possible circumstances and false under exactly the same possible circumstances. We know of no minimalist alternative here.

It is interesting to see what Horwich (1990:96) says about individuating propositions. He certainly recognizes the general problem for the minimalist of individuating propositions without recourse to truth:

. . . a central component of the notion of proposition is lodged in the statement of identity conditions for propositions -- the conditions for two utterances to express the same proposition. But this is an idea one might plausibly explain in terms of inter-translatability of utterances, which in turn, could be construed as their having the same truth conditions. And if the concept of truth is needed to say what propositions are, then a theory of truth cannot take propositions for granted.

Horwich's solution to the problem -- or rather promissory note towards a solution -- is to hope for a gloss on "u expresses the same proposition as u*" in terms of an account of utterance translation based on usage conditions. What we wish to emphasise is that the problem of individuating propositions cannot merely be regarded as the problem of saying what it is for some utterance to express the same proposition as another unless there are no fugitive

propositions -- ones ungraspable by language-users. Horwich does not discuss fugitive propositions.⁴⁸ Nor does he offer us any hope of individuating them without recourse to truth -- for, after all, fugitive propositions can hardly be individuated in terms of usage conditions by language users. In sum, the problem of fugitive propositions is a very serious one for the thin conceptual role theorist.

(c) **truth-aptness**: We mentioned earlier that the truth-schema -- "P" is true iff P -- needs to be accompanied by suitable restrictions on what counts as a fit substituent of P, on account of indexicals and paradoxes. But of course there are most obvious reasons for such need. Nonsensical sentences cannot be included. Nor can non-assertoric language. We can't say **"Go home" is true iff go home**. In short, we need to accompany the schema with a conception of what sorts of claims are fit for truth. Moreover -- and here is a further wrinkle -- it might be that certain claims are fit for truth even though they cannot find a grammatical place in that schema. One might want to say that "Thank goodness its over" expresses the proposition "Its a good thing that its over" and is thus truth-apt even though it does not fit in the schema. Nor is this an idle thought: Lewis (1970) takes the radical view that all meaningful speech acts express truth-apt propositions.

So we have the notion of "fit substituent in the schema" and the related notion of "apt for truth". The worry for thin conceptual role theory should now be clear: it is arguable the concept of truth is needed in order for us to get a handle on suitable instances of "P". But if so its conceptual role cannot be quite so thin as the most radical version of the thin conceptual role theorist says.

What alternative accounts are there around of what is fit for insertion into the schema? Wright (1992) offers us a story according to which the notion of "disciplined syntax" will do the trick. Kripke (1982:86), in the guise of Kripkenstein, offers an ostensibly quietist answer:

However one might object: (a) that only utterances of certain forms are called "true" and "false" -- questions, for example, are not -- and these are so called precisely because they

purport to state facts. . . Wittgenstein's way with this is also short. We call something a proposition, and hence true or false, when in our language we apply the calculus of truth functions to it. That is, it is just a primitive part of our language game, not susceptible to deeper explanation.⁴⁹

The first view tells us that there is a criterion of “fit for truth talk” in terms of disciplined syntax which thus does not depend on a notion of “fact-statinghood”. The second view tells us that we just apply truth talk to some sentences and not others and there is nothing further to say.

The disciplined syntax line has not yet been sufficiently elaborated upon to enable proper evaluation. What sort of discipline is necessary and sufficient? Can one say what sort of discipline is necessary and sufficient without drawing on the concept truth? We know of no developed answer to these questions.⁵⁰ About the second -- anti-theory -- line, we have nothing to say except that it strikes us as a sort of last resort. Once again, given the eminent naturalness of using the concept of truth to define the notion of “assertoric discourse”, “fit substituent for the truth schema” and so on, the onus is very much on the thin conceptual role theorist to provide a compelling alternative.

In sum, things seem fairly bleak for the thin conceptual role theorist; there is a vast range of central semantic, linguistic and psychological notions that seem, prima facie to draw on the notion of truth. Thin conceptual role minimalists have sometimes confronted this issue in particular cases, e.g. in the suggestion that meaning can be analysed in terms of conceptual role and indication conditions⁵¹, or in the suggestion that propositions are something like classes of assertability conditions⁵². However, it is far from obvious that thin conceptual role minimalists can deal with the general problem of analysing the whole class of concepts without bringing in truth. Moreover, even if thin conceptual role minimalists can deal with the general problem, it is not clear that the costs will be acceptable: a non-minimal view of truth might well be preferable to a large bunch of dubious theoretical commitments. We don't say

there is a knockdown objection to thin conceptual role minimalism here; but there is a theoretical obligation which hitherto has not been discharged.

The “No Hidden Essence” Thesis

We are rather uncertain what to say about this thesis. Certainly, our hostility to it is not nearly so great as in the the case of the “thin conceptual role” thesis. Yet a pair of worries do strike us as troublesome.

One worry is that minimalist writers often talk as if we can somehow know a priori that the property denoted by truth has no hidden essence (real definition). We can all grant that we don't know what the hidden essence of truth is a priori -- that is trivial. We can even grant that we don't know a priori that truth has a hidden essence. But the claim that we know a priori that it has no hidden essence strikes us as overly confident. Do we for example know a priori that there is no ontological realm of states of affairs that serve as truthmakers for sentences we utter? Surely not. But if there is, it cannot be ruled out that a “real definition” of truth can be provided along these lines.⁵³

We can introduce our second concern via the notions of purity and spread. Consider the following central cognitive concepts: reference, truth-aptness, satisfaction, object, property, existence, belief, assertion. On the score of hidden essence, one could try to deny that there is a hidden essence corresponding to any of these central cognitive notions, thus creating a **spread** of minimalist commitments; or else one might concede that with respect to some of these concepts, there is a real definition awaiting discovery. But one thereby risks the **purity** of the minimalist analysis of truth.

Some minimalists seem to be happy about spread; perhaps some even welcome it as inevitable.⁵⁴ However, it seems rather bold to claim that, in all the cited cases, there are no hidden essences. We suspect further that in the end, if one wishes to retain all such cognitive

notions as “belief” “assertion” and so on and yet to deny the claim that there are real definitions of such notions, one will likely need to have recourse to a superficialist conception of belief and assertion of a sort that logical behaviorists have enjoined. Don't superficialist syntax-oriented accounts of assertion require, in effect, a behavioristic conception of assertion? If, for example, one is to say that puppets and Blockhead do not mean anything by their words, doesn't that already suggest a sort of hidden essence of to the notion of meaning? Proponents of superficialist definitions of assertion have failed, in our view, to face up to the fact that they thereby take on all the problems of old logical behaviorism.

Suppose one concedes a hidden essence to some of: assertion, belief, expressing a proposition, reference and so on. To what extent is this compatible with a no hidden essence view of truth? To what extent is the purity of the no hidden essence thesis of truth compromised? An example will be helpful here. Suppose one thinks there is a hidden essence to “meaningful”. How does that bear on the thesis that there is a hidden essence to “truth of an utterance”⁵⁵ Well, being meaningful is certainly a necessary condition for the truth of an utterance. If there is an interesting, real definition of “meaningful”, then there will be an interesting, hidden, necessary condition for an utterance's being true. We can now see the sense in which the “no hidden essence thesis” may be compromised. If the thesis is that there are no interesting hidden, necessary or sufficient conditions for truth available, the thesis will be refuted unless a full spread of minimalist commitments can be sustained. If the thesis is that there is no interesting, hidden, necessary and sufficient condition for truth, then a full spread of minimalist commitments is not required by the “no hidden essence for truth” thesis. Call the former “the strong no essence view”, the latter “the weak no essence view”. We have already expressed concern about the strong no essence view. We have no direct quarrel with the weak no essence view, though we want to remind readers once again that we doubt that there is any strong a priori grounds for believing it.⁵⁶

Finally, it should be noted that “no hidden essence” views seem much less plausible

when truth is taken to be a property of tokens: sentences in the head, utterances, inscriptions, etc. As Ewing (1968:195) notes, it seems almost irresistible to say that:

A belief-state or belief-disposition is distinct from the objective fact to which it relates, and the question of the definition of truth is the inquiry about the relation between these two. ... My judgement that it rains is distinct from the raining and yet refers to it. ... When we try to say what the relation is, we are involved in difficulties, but there clearly is a relation and a legitimate question about what the relation is.⁵⁷

Virtually everyone will agree that there is a distinction to be drawn between sentence tokens and other objects in the world; but it then seems very hard to deny that, at least sometimes, the truth of sentence tokens depends upon relations between those sentence tokens and relevant objects in the world. Yet, once this much is granted, it is hard to see why one would wish to endorse a “no hidden essence” thesis about those relations.

Conclusion

Our critique of minimalist accounts of truth is clearly incomplete. In particular, we have said nothing about folk-theoretic analyses of truth, nor about the more formal “not-a-grammatical-predicate” analyses.⁵⁸ In the former case, this is because we don’t jointly have any interesting observations to make.⁵⁹ In the latter case, there is one observation which seems worth making: viz. that it is not at all clear that it is possible to give a purely formal characterisation of a truth-predicate. Many people have been tempted by the thought that any predicate which has the formal features of a truth-predicate -- in particular, satisfaction of the truth-schema -- is, ipso facto, identifiable as a truth-predicate. But, e.g., it is not clear that Wright’s “super-assertability”, if it turns out to have the formal properties of a truth-predicate, deserves to be called a truth-predicate. For, in point of conceptual role and property denoted, super-assertability could turn out to be nothing much like truth. Of course, a full discussion of

this question would be very involved -- it would require an account of the nature of properties, the possibility of modes of presentation of properties, etc. -- but it is worth observing that there is a substantive issue here: whether a predicate is a proper deserver of the name “truth” may depend upon whether that predicate picks up enough of the conceptual role of, and picks out a property sufficiently similar to that picked out by, the ordinary English “is true”.

Even though our discussion is thus, admittedly, incomplete, we hope that it will serve to stimulate further investigation; and, in particular, that it will prompt those who march under the banner of “minimalism about truth” to pay more attention to the foundational worries which we have raised. The claim that truth is minimal can mean many different things which ought not to be conflated; and some of those claims which ought not to be conflated seem most unlikely to be true.⁶⁰

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ENDNOTES

¹See, e.g., Strawson (1949), Austin (1950) and Sellars (1962) for discussion of some of the difficulties here.

²We make no distinction between “minimal” and “deflationary”; others may use the terminology differently.

³Some minimalists -- those who grant priority to folk practice -- may object to any formulation which appeals to sentences or schemas involving quotation, on the grounds that this involves a controversial regimentation of folk practice. The schema: **It is true that P iff P** might be acceptable to such minimalists even though the schema **“P” is true iff P** is not. Moreover, there might be some advantages to this approach: in general, predicate/quotation-analyses of vocabulary are prone to paradox in ways in which operator treatments seem not to be (c.f. the discussion of necessity in Montague (1974)). Since we shall not be concerned with technicalities, we shall ignore these kinds of considerations.

⁴Holton (unpublished) distinguishes three kinds of minimalist accounts: (i) **list accounts** (which focus on a list of instances of the truth-schema); (ii) **schema accounts** (which focus on the truth-schema); and (iii) **substitutivity accounts** (which focus on the exchangeability or intersubstitutivity properties generated by the truth-schema). Questions about substitutivity deserve more attention. Field (1992:322n1) claims that the truth-schema should be strengthened to: **It is logically necessary that the proposition that p is true iff p**, since “otherwise we will not be able to interchange “p” and “it is true that p” inside modal contexts”. Numerous questions arise: Should there be a similar extension to hyperintensional

contexts? If not, can the failure of substitutivity -- in say belief contexts -- be given a minimalist explanation? Do similar considerations apply for schemas which involve disquotation? Etc. We shall not pursue these questions here; however, we do think that Holton's distinctions point to an important area in which minimalists need to do more work.

⁵Armed with the schema, one might wish to go on to say that "P" and "'P' is true" are logically equivalent; but there are potential pitfalls. Dummett (1978) argues that if one rejects bivalence, one ought not to say that "P" and "'P' is true" are logically equivalent, since if "P" has no truth value, "'P' is true" ought to be regarded as false. Holton (unpublished) -- drawing on ideas due to Scott Soames and Nathan Salmon -- discusses the possibility of constructing "gappy" predicates, i.e. predicates for which there are objects which lie neither in their extension nor their anti-extension; however, following Kripke, he suggests that if "P" has no truth value, then neither does "'P' is true". We shall not pursue these subtle issues -- especially concerning the viability of a distinction between internal (predicate) negation and external (sentence) negation -- here.

⁶See, for example, James (1909), Strawson (1949) and Rorty (1982).

⁷ See, e.g. Grover, Camp and Belnap (1975) , developed further in Grover (1992). See, also, Prior (1969) and Williams (1992) for a related analysis using the "somewhether/thether" construction: "If the Pope believes somewhether, then thether". These views are all descended from Ramsey (1927).

⁸ Both strategies appear in Ramsey (1927). At p.45, "He is always right" is rendered as "For all P, if he asserts that P, then P" , but general propositions are later glossed as infinite conjunctions of atomic propositions. Ramsey does not overlook the objections: (i) that I can

assert a general proposition without having heard of something named in the infinite conjunction; and (ii) that an infinite conjunction of atomic propositions is not equivalent to a universal quantification, since the former contains no guarantee that everything is named -- though we ourselves doubt the adequacy of his answers. (Gupta (1993) provides various reasons for doubting the adequacy of allegedly minimalist paraphrases in terms of infinite lists, some of which can be adapted to the analysis which Ramsey gives.)

⁹See Tarski (1936) and Resnick (1990). It would be very odd to classify Tarski as a minimalist about truth: rather, he is an eliminativist about truth simpliciter who buys into a non-minimalist account of “truth-in-L”.

¹⁰Tarski’s position on “is true” might be taken to be a version of a more general position, viz. one which claims that “is true” is not significant because governed by incoherent conditions. On one reading, Dummett might be taken to be a proponent of a view of this kind: truth requires evidence-transcendence, but the notion of evidence-transcendence is incoherent. Some eliminativists about semantics and psychology -- e.g. the Churchlands, at least in some moods -- might also be committed to claims of this kind: truth involves platitudinous connections to intentional states, but the underlying psychology of intentional states is incoherent.

¹¹We shall not essay here a story about what the distinction between gerrymandered and natural or “eligible” properties amounts to, supposing that it is a tenable distinction. C.f. Lewis (1984)

¹²Thus for example, Grover (1992:14) “reserves ‘substantive’ for those theories of truth that claim that truth is a property with an explanatory role”, placing herself on the other,

“deflationary” side of the fence.

¹³ We take it that this is the position adopted by Horwich (1990), who claims that a complete theory of truth is given by all instances of the schema **the proposition that p is true iff p**, where the instances in question are declarative sentences from any possible extension of English, tokened in any possible contexts of tokening. In Horwich’s words, truth is a “logical” property, but not a “complex” or “naturalistic” property. (See Horwich (1990:38).)

¹⁴Quine (1953:36) rejects the temptation to “suppose in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component” noting that “Given this supposition, it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null”. The discarding of a “truth by correspondence to fact” which contrasts with other truths was also important to Sellars (1963:210), who contrasts his own view with the claim of the early Wittgenstein that while it is fine to say “2 plus 2 is 4” is true iff $2+2=4$ and to say that $2+2=4$, it is wrong to say that “‘ $2=2=4$ ’ pictures a fact”.

¹⁵Note that we do not mean to suggest that anyone who accepts some kind of analytic/synthetic distinction is thereby committed to a supersense for “truth”, for one can quite consistently hold that analytic truths are made true by the world, etc. Rather, the point is that some conceptions of the analytic/synthetic distinction require a distinction between kinds of truths.

¹⁶See, e.g., Williams (1978) on “the Absolute Conception of the World”.

¹⁷C.f. Strawson (1992:91) “I am not saying that we should give up altogether the simple model of word-to-world correspondence. On the contrary. I remarked long ago on the central role, in our system of ideas, of the distinction between our judgments on the one hand and, on

the other, the objective reality which makes them true or false. So there are plenty of cases -- perhaps the majority- to which the simple model applies in an unqualified way. Instead of abandoning the model, we should rather consider the kinds of cases to which it applies without reserve as the primary or basic cases of truth; and then, taking this as a starting point, seek to explain how it is possible and legitimate to extend the notion of truth beyond these limits without feeding on myth or illusion.”

Another pros hen story: Heidegger (1962) contends that the traditional conception of truth as agreement of judgment with the world is “ontologically derivative” from a more primordial sense of truth connected with the notion of truth as “disclosedness”.

¹⁸Frede (1987:190f.)

¹⁹Fine (1984:97)

²⁰Compare Sellars (1962), for a related view.

²¹Grover (1992)

²²Price (1989)

²³See e.g. Field (1994)

²⁴ We acknowledge that in the strict sense of definition, according to which to define a word is to provide some expression that can be substituted for that word in every non-tropistic context which the original appears, few think there is a nominal definition of truth. But it is arguable that “true” can be contextually defined by certain analytic platitudes about truth; and that looser notion of “nominal definition” is the one that concerns us here.

²⁵Actually, there are three views to distinguish, viz: (i) the claim that truth is easily exhausted analytically, i.e. superficially; (ii) the claim that truth can be exhausted analytically, though

not perhaps without significant effort; and (iii) the claim that truth cannot be exhausted analytically. We reserve the label “no hidden essence” for (iii); others might also wish to extend it to (ii).

²⁶ The “no hidden essence” theme is fairly central in Horwich (1990:2) : “. . . two related misconceptions: first, that truth has some hidden structure awaiting our discovery; and, secondly, that hinging on this discovery is our ability to explain central philosophical principles”. We note, though, that it is not properly distinguished from the “thin conceptual role” thesis.

²⁷ Other proposals might invoke: the will of God, a naturalistic reduction of truth, etc.

²⁸ C.f. Armstrong (1978)

²⁹ C.f. Lewis (1986)

³⁰ The Ramsey-Lewis approach does not, of itself, require that the platitudes provide the materials for an exhaustive analysis of the concept(s) under consideration: it could be that the platitudes -- and the resulting Ramsey sentence -- are merely used to fix reference. Of course, in this case, the outcome need not be anything which is minimal along the dimension of compliance with folk practice. Moreover, even if the Ramsey-Lewis approach is used to fix meaning, it seems that it is compatible with the existence of hidden essences -- c.f. the radical, allegedly neo-Wittgensteinian version discussed in the text.

³¹ See Jackson, Oppy, and Smith (1994); cf Rawls (1971) and Goodman (1954).

³² See O’Leary-Hawthorne (1994) for further discussion and references.

³³ We have avoided use of the expression 'quietism about truth' in our discussion since it is unclear to us whether it is merely supposed to preclude revisions to folk practice or whether it

is supposed to preclude additions as well.

³⁴Of course, on most plausible accounts of rational revision of belief, this is a significant cost incurred by those views of truth, even though they are no doubt minimalist along other dimensions.

³⁵e.g. Field (1994)

³⁶Horwich (1990)

³⁷ Gupta (1993) argues that a popular kind of disquotational theory of truth is unacceptable because it attributes much too large an ideology to “true”. While a list of sentences of the form “**p** is true iff p” may fix the extension and intension of the truth predicate, it is clear that we cannot think that these sentences fix the sense of that predicate: one needn’t possess every concept before one can possess the concept of truth. (See also David (1994:126ff.) for useful discussion of this objection.)

³⁸Another related question which deserves attention concerns the theoretical resources required to generate a non-minimal conception of truth. Perhaps commitment to propositions, or possible worlds, or properties (universals), or states of affairs, or even compositional linguistic structure, brings with it a commitment to a non-minimal conception of truth with both thick conceptual role and hidden essence. After all, it seems neither simple nor a priori that there is a certain kind of isomorphism between deep syntactic structure and the truth-makers which these theories provide. These considerations are clearly related to the dimension of theoretical commitment, and to questions about the difficulty of seeing in advance that there is much reason to be interested in the local issues about the commitments incurred by use of non-minimal truth predicates.

³⁹ We don't pretend our list of problems to be exhaustive. Particular minimalisms about truth are often confronted by a whole host of technical questions that we do not engage with here. Do they have the resources to account for: (i) truths expressed in other languages; (ii) modal and counterfactual propositions involving the truth predicate; (iii) truths expressed using indexicals or ambiguous language; (iv) truths expressed using vague language; (v) the role of the truth predicate in the explanation of learning from others? (Cf. Field (1994)) Do they have the resources to cope with various kinds of paradoxes, e.g. semantic paradoxes (Liar, strengthened Liar, etc.) and Moorean paradoxes (blindspots)? (Cf. Soames (1984) and Sorenson (1989)) And so on. We don't mean to endorse or reject these worries here. (See David (1994) for useful discussion, of some of the kinds of objections mentioned here, in the context of relatively pure disquotational theories.)

⁴⁰ Fine is one writer who seems to conflate the “no super sense” thesis with the “no hidden essence” thesis.

⁴¹ We heard Sally Haslanger use this example in a paper she read at Monash University.

⁴² Quine (1990)

⁴³ For present purposes, we discount complications raised by the paradoxes, deferring to Kripke and company to straighten things out.

⁴⁴ A test case: Could it be a law of nature that when someone says something true, the nearest rock explodes?

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Boghossian (1990).

⁴⁶ Horwich (1990:75)

⁴⁷ There is another worry, too: how are we to understand the modal term -- “**can't** be asserted”

-- which appears in Horwich's account, given that he is trying to provide a foundation for the notion of logical incompatibility? If he can help himself to a primitive notion of impossibility, then he doesn't need the detour through non-coassertability; and if he can't help himself to a primitive notion of impossibility, then he hasn't made any advance in his effort to ground a notion of logical incompatibility. (Thanks to Daniel Nolan for discussion at this point.)

⁴⁸Horwich (1990:19n4) does discuss "propositions that are not expressible in current English". He has two suggestions: (i) consider possible extensions of English; (ii) specify the propositional structure possessed by all and only instances of the truth-schema. But neither of these suggestions meets all of the concerns raised by what we are calling "fugitive propositions".

⁴⁹The appeal to "application of the calculus of truth functions" needs to be firmed up a bit: "Shut the door!" shouldn't count as truth-apt in virtue of the potential utterability of "Don't shut the door!" or "If the window is open, then shut the door!". One thought is that it is embeddability in the antecedent of conditionals which is crucial; this thought is perhaps not unrelated to our earlier discussion of a putative primitive conception of logical incompatibility. However, it is not at all clear that this test gives the right results: as Michaelis Michael has noted, there are declarative sentences involving adverbial constructions which seem not to be thus embeddable. Moreover -- though perhaps not independently -- there are also questions about ellipsis to consider: in some circumstances, it seems right to count utterances of "Yes!" as truth-apt; but these clearly fail naive versions of the embeddability test. Proponents of the Wittgensteinian line clearly have work to do here.

⁵⁰Perhaps the following suggestion bears some promise: The fit substitution instances of the t-

schema “**P**” is true if **P** are all and only the fit substitution instances of the schema **P iff P**. Of course, this isn’t obviously right -- we may need to make allowances for indexicals, Lewis-type truth-apt sentences which are not fit substitution instances of the ordinary biconditional, etc. -- but it does suggest the thought that, if one could understand the simple logical sentential connectives without drawing on the concept of truth, then one could use that understanding to determine the class of fit substituends for the truth-schema. Various questions arise: How is the class of fit substituends for the ordinary biconditional to be circumscribed, if not in terms of truth? Should one think of the ability to recognise fit substituends in the simple biconditional schema as a manifestation of a practical (non-theoretical, non-reflective) grasp of the concept of truth? What theoretical advantage is there in views which treat all of the logical connectives as (relative) primitives and truth as (relatively) derivative? Etc. Clearly, evaluation of the suggestion must be deferred until it has been more fully developed.

⁵¹c.f a view aired, though not endorsed, by Field (1994)

⁵²c.f the view endorsed by Horwich (1990)

⁵³Indeed, Armstrong suggested in conversation to one of us that he regarded his truthmaker account of truth as synthetic metaphysical speculation rather than as analytic truth about truth.

⁵⁴See, e.g., Horwich, (1994) and Wright (1992).

⁵⁵Note in fact there are a plurality of “no hidden essence” theses available according to the plurality of truth bearers that one recognizes.

⁵⁶**Truth-aptness** appears to raise similar considerations when considered as a plausible necessary condition for truth. More controversially, **reference** and **satisfaction** might jointly

be taken to provide sufficient conditions for truth -- and necessary and sufficient conditions for truth-in-L -- at least in the case of sentence-tokenings, c.f. Tarski (1936). It seems to us to be an open question whether some range of concepts with hidden essences can be used to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for truth.

⁵⁷We have often heard Frank Jackson urge similar considerations, e.g. in connection with sentence-tokens of the type: "That cup is on the table".

⁵⁸Moreover, we have said much less than we ought about the tricky question of the **bearers** of truth. Is truth (primarily) a property of: sentence-tokens? sentence-types? sentence-tokenings? utterances? statements? propositions? thoughts? beliefs? etc. If truth is (primarily) a property of propositions, how should these be construed: as sets of possible worlds? as classes of circumstances of evaluation of sentence-tokenings? as abstract structured entities of some sort? etc. Perhaps there are varieties of minimalism which are plausible for truth qua property of propositions, but not for truth qua property of sentence-tokenings, and vice versa. It would require another, and quite different, paper to sort all of this out. (Clearly, the discussion of fugitive propositions and the discussion of theoretical resources which generate non-minimal conceptions of truth are relevant here.)

⁵⁹Each of us has elsewhere discussed folk-theoretic analyses of truth-aptness: see Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994) and O'Leary-Hawthorne and Price (forthcoming). A proper sorting out of the issues involved in the folk-theoretic analysis of truth would require another paper, about whose content we might not be fully able to agree.

⁶⁰ We wish to thank all of those with whom we have separately and jointly discussed the material presented in this paper, including, among others: Simon Blackburn, Richard Holton,

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