1. Introduction

I am a competent speaker of English, and I just uttered the sentence ‘It is cold outside.’ I may not know that it is cold outside, and therefore I may not know that the sentence I just uttered is true. But if I have the concept of truth, then at least I know the following fact: the sentence ‘It is cold outside’ (as just uttered by me) is true if and only if it is cold outside. Accounting for my knowledge of such facts is at least a prima facie constraint on any plausible approach to meaning and truth.

At first sight, a deflationary account of truth seems to put us in an ideal position to explain our knowledge of the truth conditions of our own sentences, by construing such knowledge as a trivial by-product of our competence with a deflationary truth locution. And this seems to put the deflationist at an advantage over those who construe our notion of truth as a more substantive one. I shall argue against the widespread assumption that the deflationist can really explain, or even make room for, the fact that competent speakers know the truth-conditions of their own sentences. One of my aims, in doing this is, is to deprive the deflationist of this apparent advantage over the non-deflationist. My further aim is to shed light on the significance of deflationism, or, on the implications of taking this view of truth seriously. Though I will here focus on one influential form of deflationism, the so-called disquotational account of truth, my argument can be naturally extended to other versions of deflationism.²

Following Hartry Field, let us characterize disquotationalism in terms of his notion of a pure disquotational truth predicate. ‘Is true’ as I use it is a pure disquotational truth predicate if and only if (a) I can only meaningfully apply this predicate to sentences that I understand a certain way, and (b) it is an exhaustive account of the meaning of this

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¹ As I understand it, the common thread among deflationists of different stripes is the idea that ‘is true’ is a purely syntactic device whose role in our language we can adequately and exhaustively capture in terms of certain equivalences between sentences in which it occurs and sentences in which it does not. The main differences between different forms of deflationism concern the mechanism that is taken to govern these equivalences. Disquotationalists take ‘is true’ to be a predicate of sentences governed by the schema <‘s’ is true if and only if s>. Horwich prefers to speaks of propositional truth, and takes the relevant schema to be <The proposition that p is true if and only if p>. Brandom takes ‘is true’ to be a prosentence forming operator which, when applied to an expression that designates a sentence s (or set of sentences) results in a sentence whose content is inherited from s (or from sentences in the designated set). See Field 2001, McGee 2005, Horwich 2005, and Brandom 1994. For a precursor of Brandom’s version of prosententialism, see Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975.
predicate that for each such sentence \( s \), the sentence in which ‘is true’ is applied to a quotation name for \( s \) is “cognitively equivalent,” in some suitable sense, to \( s \).\(^2\)

Disquotationalists hold that our primary notion of truth is the notion of pure disquotational truth.\(^3\)

Disquotationalism has appeared to be just what we need to secure our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our own sentences and of the references of our terms in the face of various arguments purporting to establish the indeterminacy or ungroundedness of semantic facts.\(^4\) Vann McGee, for instance, proposes a disquotational conception of reference—an extension of the disquotational conception of truth—as a solution to the following “paradox” about reference:

It is a plain fact that, when I use the word “rabbit”, I am referring to rabbits, and to nothing else. But when we look at all the nonsemantic facts about a speaker and her usage that determine what she means by the words she uses, we find that the totality of relevant non-semantic facts … don’t suffice to determine whether a speaker, whether it’s me or a speaker of Jungle, uses a word to refer to rabbits or to undetached rabbit parts. How can this be? There surely aren’t free floating semantic facts, facts about meaning and reference that aren’t somehow grounded in nonsemantic circumstances.\(^5\)

On the disquotational conception of reference, “prefixing “the referent of” to the quotation name of a singular term undoes the effect of the quotation marks, as does prefixing “the referents of” to a quotation name of a general term.”\(^6\) Thus, since the claim ‘“Rabbit” refers to rabbits’ is, on this account, equivalent to ‘Rabbits are rabbits’, it is clearly not one that it would make sense to justify by appeal to facts about my usage of the word ‘rabbit’.

In the same vein, the disquotational reading of ‘is true’ is supposed to explain how I can hold on to claims about the truth-conditions of my own sentences even if I am


\(^3\) Though a disquotationalist need not deny the intelligibility of other notions of truth applicable to sentences we do not understand, he thinks that any such notion would have to be definable in terms of pure disquotational truth, together with, as Field puts it, “fairly limited additional resources” (“Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse,” Field 2001, p. 223). In particular, any notion of translation or synonymy employed in characterizing truth for other languages would have to be independent of any notion of truth applicable across languages.

\(^4\) Such arguments abound in the literature. Among the most influential ones are those of Quine 1960 and Kripke 1982.


\(^6\) Ibid, p. 410.
convinced that all the relevant facts about any given speaker’s use of words do not suffice to determine any particular way of assigning truth-conditions to her sentences as the correct one.\footnote{Note that the difficulties to which disquotationalism is supposed to provide an answer do not depend on embracing Field and McGee’s commitment to the reducibility of the semantic to the non-semantic, but can stem from a commitment to the publicness of meaning—or, some version of the idea that there are no “hidden,” or “private” semantic facts. Just as with the reducibility requirement, disquotationalism can be invoked as a way to hold on to the requirement of publicness while acknowledging that all the publicly available facts about a speaker are compatible with different ways of assigning truth-conditions to his sentences and reference to his terms. For indeterminacy claims based on publicness rather than reducibility, see Davidson 1984, and in particular, “Radical Interpretation,” “Belief and the Basis of Meaning,” and “Reality without Reference.”}

But can disquotationalism really help explain our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our own sentences? I shall argue that despite initial appearances, disquotationalism cannot explain our knowledge of truth-conditions, though there is a sense in which it can make sense of our entitlement to assert unproblematic instances of the T-schema (sentences of the form \(<'s'\) is true if and only if \(s\)). I suspect that it is the former task that the disquotationalist is really interested in. More importantly, this is the task that he needs to address in order to deal with the perceived difficulties facing non-deflationary approaches to truth. Thus, in showing that the deflationist is not able to carry out this task, we would have undermined one central motivation for his position.

In the next section, I say a bit more about what disquotationalism, as I understand it, comes to. I then examine Field’s and McGee’s apparent attempts to explain facts about truth in terms of the logic of ‘is true’. Arguing that we cannot take these appearances at face value (section 3), I sketch a more plausible interpretation (section 4), on which what Field and McGee are really trying to do is explain our knowledge of facts about truth in terms of our grasp of the meaning of ‘is true.’ Section 4 then draws attention to a crucial distinction between knowing that a given sentence is true and knowing the truth that the sentence expresses. As I argue, it is plausible that in explaining a speaker’s knowledge that a given sentence is true (in her language), we have thereby explained her knowledge of the truth (or fact) the sentence expresses, only insofar as we assume that the speaker knows the truth-conditions of her own sentences. In section 5, I sketch Boghossian’s account of epistemic analyticity, that is, of how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify us in holding it to be true, and examine what would be involved in extending it into an account of how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify us in believing the proposition it expresses. I then show (in section 6) why our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences is too fundamental to be amenable to any such account based on epistemic analyticity. Finally, in section 7, I offer an alternative account of McGee’s and Field’s aims, on which they can, in some sense, be said to be explaining our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences in terms of our grasp of ‘is true’, but only by adopting a deflated conception of belief and a non-factive conception of knowledge.
2. A closer look at disquotationalism

Consider the following four types of claims, made by, or on behalf of, disquotationalists about truth:

- Claims pertaining to the role of ‘is true’ in our language. For instance, the claim that the sentences ‘Snow is white’ and ‘“Snow is white” is true’ are, as Field puts it, “cognitively equivalent” in our language.
- Claims about the content of our claims about truth. For instance, the claim that to call the sentence ‘Snow is white’ true is to call snow white.
- Claims about the nature of truth as a property of sentences. For instance, the claim that truth is a use-independent property of sentences.
- Claims about the conditions under which our sentences are true, and our knowledge of these conditions. For instance, the claim that given the logic of ‘is true’, I cannot be wrong in thinking that ‘Snow is white’ as I use it is true if and only if snow is white.

In advocating the disquotational account of truth, Field and McGee seamlessly go back and forth between these four types of claims. It is not clear, however, that there is a successful position that encompasses them all. What is clear, I think, is that the disquotational account of truth is, in the first instance, an account of the central role of talk about truth, or, of the locution ‘is true’ in our language. The disquotationalist’s claims about the content of our attributions of truth, the nature of truth, and our knowledge of these conditions are meant to flow from his account of ‘is true’ as a pure disquotational truth predicate. But is there a legitimate route from the disquotationalist’s account of the role of ‘is true’ to these various other kinds of claims? I want to suggest that there is no such route, unless the disquotationalist helps himself to a pre-existing

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8 For example, consider Quine’s remark that “[by] calling the sentence [‘Snow is white’] true, we call snow white” (Quine 1970, p.12). See also Field 2001, p. 121-122:

[F]or me, the claim that utterance u is true in the pure disquotational sense is cognitively equivalent to u itself as I understand it … [This] feature of the pure disquotational notion of truth means that this notion is of a use-independent property: to call ‘Snow is white’ disquotationally true is simply to call snow white; hence it is not to attribute it a property that it wouldn’t have had if I and other English speakers had used words differently.

9 Ibid.. See also McGee 2005, p. 410:

For the disquotationalist, what makes “Snow is white” true is the whiteness of snow; nothing more is required. For the correspondence theorist, what makes “Snow is white” true are the whiteness of snow together with the linguistic practices of the community of speakers in virtue of which the sentence means what it does.

10 And, by extension, an account of the central role of similar locutions in other languages—what, by analogy with our own language, we identify as the “truth predicates” of other languages.
notion of truth, thus undermining his commitment to the primacy of the pure disquotational notion.

3. Some puzzling remarks

According to Field, an “inflationist” about reference faces the task of explaining how the reference of our words is determined by facts about their use, and the difficulties encountered in trying to give such an account provide a motivation for deflationism. As he sees it,

the deflationist view is that there is nothing to explain: it is simply part of the logic of ‘refers’ (or ‘is true of’) that ‘rabbit’ refers to (is true of) rabbits and to nothing else.\footnote{\textcopyright Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content,” Field 2001, p. 116.}

Paralleling this claim about the logic of ‘refers’, Field would say that it is simply part of the logic of ‘is true’ that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.

Similarly McGee argues that for the disquotationalist,

[both of the following biconditionals are made true by the meaning of the word “true”:

“Harry is bald” is true (in the present context) if and only if Harry is bald.

“Harry is not bald” is true (in the present context) if and only if Harry is not bald.\footnote{McGee 2005, p. 412.}

If these claims are interpreted literally, Field seems to be trying to explain the fact that ‘rabbit’ refers to rabbits purely in terms of our meaning what we do by the sentence “rabbit” refers to rabbits.’ Similarly, McGee seems to be proposing that we explain the truth of our T-sentences purely in terms of our meaning what we do by these sentences. But is it really plausible to think that Field and McGee are explaining either the truth of a sentence, or the truth that the sentence expresses, in terms of our meaning what we do by the sentence? Consider any alleged example of “truth by virtue of meaning alone,” such as the sentence ‘If Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy.’ Though we might be tempted to describe this sentence as true simply by virtue of its meaning what it does (namely, that if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy), it is, on reflection, hard to deny that the truth of this sentence also has to do with the fact that if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy. And it does not

\footnote{“Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content,” Field 2001, p. 116.}
seem plausible to explain this necessary fact about the world in terms of contingent facts about our linguistic practices.

For these sorts of reasons, many philosophers, following Quine, are now skeptical of so-called metaphysical analyticity, or, the idea of truth by virtue of meaning alone. But even if we could make sense of this idea, it still would not be compatible with the disquotationalist’s claims about truth. A sentence that is true solely by virtue of its meaning, if there is any such thing, is a sentence whose truth at least depends on its meaning. But pure disquotational truth, Field and McGee claim, is not a use-dependent property of a sentence, that is, it is not a property of a sentence that depends on any facts about its use. It is supposed to follow from the disquotational account of ‘is true’ that the truth of ‘Snow is white’ only has to do with the whiteness of snow, not with facts about its meaning or use.

4. Epistemic analyticity, belief, and the holding true of a sentence

In light of both reasonable doubts about the intelligibility of the metaphysical notion of analyticity and of its incompatibility with the disquotationalist’s claims about truth, we should find another reading for the claims quoted at the beginning of section 3. Despite initial appearances, it would be more plausible, and more in line with their explanatory goals, to take Field and McGee to be employing the epistemic notion of analyticity that Paul Boghossian has usefully distinguished from the metaphysical one. Following Boghossian, let us characterize a sentence as analytic in the epistemic sense if mere grasp of its meaning justifies us in holding it true. As Boghossian has argued, once we distinguish the two notions of analyticity, it is far from obvious that the legitimacy of the epistemic notion depends on the legitimacy of the metaphysical one. Moreover, the disquotationalist’s depiction of truth as a use-independent property of sentences, though incompatible with the idea of truth by virtue of meaning, might well be compatible with the claim that we can know a sentence to be true solely by virtue of grasping its meaning.

Let us, then, re-interpret Field and McGee’s claims as claims pertaining to epistemic, rather than metaphysical, analyticity. Field’s claim, thus reformulated, comes to this:

Mere grasp of the meaning of the sentence “Rabbit” refers to rabbits and to nothing else’ justifies us in believing that ‘Rabbit’ refers to rabbits and to nothing else.

13 See Quine 1953.

14 Boghossian 1997, p. 337.
Similarly, McGee’s claim would be:

For the disquotationalist, mere grasp of the meaning of each of the following two sentences justifies us in holding them true:

“Harry is bald” is true (in the present context) if and only if Harry is bald.

“Harry is not bald” is true (in the present context) if and only if Harry is not bald.

I would like to draw attention to a subtle but important difference between Field’s and McGee’s claims, as here interpreted. Field is claiming that mere grasp of the meaning of the sentence ‘“Rabbit” refers to rabbits and to nothing else’ justifies us in believing the proposition it expresses. McGee, on the other hand, is claiming only that mere grasp of the meaning of his two sentences justifies us in holding them true. He says nothing about whether it justifies us in believing the propositions these sentences express.

Boghossian’s account of epistemic analyticity, as spelled out in Boghossian 1997, is primarily an account of how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify us in holding it true. Assuming that this account is plausible, can it also help explain how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify us in believing the truth it expresses?

Boghossian does intend for his account of epistemic analyticity to shed light on how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify us in believing the proposition it expresses, or, explain our knowledge of the truth that it expresses. In an effort to work with a picture of belief that is “hospitable to Quine’s basic outlook” (as opposed to the conception, that he himself favors, of belief as a relation to a proposition), Boghossian proposes that

for a person T to believe that p is for T to hold true a sentence S which means that p in T’s idiolect …

[F]or T to know that p is for T to justifiably hold S true, with a strength sufficient for knowledge, and for S to be true. And to say that T knows p a priori is to say that T’s warrant for holding S true is independent of outer, sensory experience.\(^{15}\)

The idea that my believing that p involves my holding true a sentence S that means that p is quite plausible, if we assume that I have a language (or idiolect) in which my thoughts are expressible. But what accounts for its plausibility? Why is it plausible at all that when S means that p in my idiolect, my holding S to be true amounts to my believing that p? Only because, I want to suggest, S’s meaning that p in my idiolect

\(^{15}\)Boghossian 1997, p. 333.
involves my knowing, or at least believing, that S is true (in my idiolect) if and only if p.\textsuperscript{16}

Similarly, consider Boghossian’s further proposal that when S in my idiolect means that p, my knowing that p involves S’s being true, together with my justifiably holding S true (with a strength sufficient for knowledge). This claim derives its plausibility from the assumption that if S means that p in my idiolect, I know that S is true (in my idiolect) if and only if p. In other words, what I am suggesting here is that the assumption that a speaker knows the conditions under which her sentences are true plays a crucial role in tying the speaker’s knowledge of the truth of her sentences to her knowledge of the facts they express.\textsuperscript{17} This idea will play a key role in my arguments.

5. Boghossian’s account of epistemic analyticity

At the heart of Boghossian’s account of epistemic analyticity is an account of the epistemic analyticity of logic—that is, of how we can explain our knowledge of the truth of sentences of logic, or of the validity of certain inferences, purely in terms of our grasp of the meaning of logical vocabulary. His account centers on the following thesis:

\textit{Implicit definition}: It is by arbitrarily stipulating that certain sentences of logic are to be true, or that certain inferences are to be valid, that we attach a meaning to the logical constants. More specifically, a particular constant means that logical object, if any, which would make valid a specified set of sentences and/or inferences involving it.\textsuperscript{18}

Following Boghossian, let us rely on Implicit Definition to try to justify the following argument form, where C is a logical constant, F a sentence form that is constitutive of C’s meaning what it does, and S a sentence of the form F:

\begin{enumerate}
\item If logical constant C is to mean what it does, then sentences of the form F have to be true, for C means whatever logical object in fact makes sentences of the form F true.
\item C means what it does.
\item S is a sentence of the form F.
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{16} By contrast, S’s meaning that p in the language of my community does not depends on my taking S to mean that p, or to be true if and only if p, in this language. For, I can surely be mistaken about what a given sentence means in my linguistic community.

\textsuperscript{17} For, suppose S means that p in a language L that I do not understand. I can know that S is true in L without grasping the meaning of S in L. In this case, my knowledge of the truth of S does not amount to my knowledge that p, because I do not know that S is true in L if and only if p.

\textsuperscript{18} Boghossian 1997, p. 348.
Therefore,

(4) S is true.\(^{19}\)

I shall refer to this as “the Basic Argument.”\(^{20}\) Suppose this argument successfully explains how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence could justify me in holding it true. Can it also help explain how mere grasp of the meaning of a sentence can justify me in believing the truth it expresses?

Note, first, that I could know that an expression C is meaningful in a language L (or, that it means what it does in L), that the meaning of C in L is fixed by stipulating that sentences of a given form are to be true, and that S is a sentence of this form, without knowing what either C or S means. In other words, I could know (1), (2) and (3) without grasping the meaning of C or S. In this case, Boghossian’s proposed justification for (4) would not depend on my grasp of the meanings of S and C. This of course does not mean that Boghossian is wrong to assume that grasp of the meanings of S and C is one way for me to know (1), (2) and (3). What is striking about the case in which I know (1), (2) and (3) without knowing what either S or C means is that even if my knowledge of (1), (2) and (3) can explain my knowledge of the fact that S is true, it is irrelevant to explaining my knowledge of the truth that S expresses. The question I want to ask is, what is the relevant difference between this case and the case in which I know what S and C mean? How is it that my mere grasp of the meanings of S and C can explain, not just my knowledge of the truth of S, by also, my knowledge of the truth that S expresses?\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) This is a modified version of the argument form found in Boghossian 1997 (p. 357). Boghossian’s primary goal there is to explain our knowledge of the validity of our inference forms. Since I am primarily interested in Boghossian’s account as it bears on our knowledge of the truth of our sentences, I have recast his argument form in terms of sentences and truth rather than inference and validity.

\(^{20}\) As Boghossian 1997 acknowledges, this form of argument can explain our knowledge of the truth of sentences of logic as derived solely from our knowledge of the meaning of logical constants only if we assume that knowledge of the meaning of a logical constant includes knowledge of how its meaning is fixed. As Laurence and Margolis 2005 further point out, this would amount to an account of the a priority of logic only if we further assume that our knowledge of the meanings of our logical constants, or our knowledge of their meaningfulness, is itself a priori. Margolis and Laurence go on to question whether Boghossian gives us any good reason for this assumption. It is not part of my purposes here to examine whether, in explaining our knowledge of the truth of sentences of logic in terms of our knowledge of facts about meaning, Boghossian is really showing our knowledge of the truth of these sentences to be a priori. Nor do I wish to take a stand on whether Boghossian’s explanation of our knowledge of the truth of sentences of logic in terms of our grasp of the meaning of logical vocabulary is successful.

\(^{21}\) Boghossian’s 1997 account takes implicit definitions to provide entitlements by, as he later puts it, “supplying premises from which the truth of various propositions may somehow be derived” (Boghossian 2003, p. 25). Boghossian 2003 replaces this “inferential” construal of epistemic analyticity with a “constitutive model”: it is the fact that a speaker grasps the meaning of a sentence that entitles her to hold the sentence true—provided that her holding-true of the sentence is constitutive of her meaning
Consider the following example. Suppose ‘if then’ (construed as the material conditional) comes to have the meaning it does in my idiolect by my stipulating that certain argument forms containing it are valid, or that certain forms of sentences are true. Suppose that <If p and q, then p> is one such sentence form, and consider the following instance:

[A] If Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy.

Here is the Basic Argument, applied to this example:

1. If ‘if then’ is to mean what it does, then sentences of the form <If p and q, then p> have to be true, for ‘if then’ means whatever logical object in fact makes sentences of certain specified forms, including sentences of the form <If p and q, then p>, true.
2. ‘If then’ means what it does.
3. [A] is a sentence of the form <If p and q, then p>.

Therefore,

4. [A] is true.

If this argument does what it is supposed to do, what we have here is an explanation of how I know that [A] is true purely by virtue of grasping its meaning. But how might this also help explain how I know the truth that [A] expresses purely by virtue of grasping its meaning? Here is one way of understanding this question: what further premises, in addition to (1), (2) and (3) might help us derive not just the conclusion that [A] is true, but also, the conclusion that if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy? What we need, of course, is a premise that is justifiable purely in terms of my grasp of the meaning of [A]. Here is an obvious candidate:

(T) [A] is true if and only if, if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy.

Adding this premise, we can argue as follows:

what she does by a non-defective expression. The arguments of this paper would have to be cast differently if we start with the later model. The main point, which would simply come into play at a different place if we start with this model, is that it is one thing to explain why a speaker is entitled to hold a sentence true, another to explain why she is entitled to a given object-level belief. Of course, the two tasks usually go hand-in-hand, since when a sentence s in a speaker’s idiolect means that p, the speaker’s believing that p involves her holding s true. But as I explained earlier, this is only plausible insofar as the speaker takes s to be true if and only if p.
(1) If ‘if then’ is to mean what it does, then [A] has to be true, for ‘if then’ means whatever logical object in fact makes sentences of certain specified forms, including sentences of the form <If p and q, then p>, true.

(2) ‘If then’ means what it does.

(3) [A] is of the form <If p and q, then p>.

(T[A]) [A] is true if and only if, if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy.

(4) [A] is true. (from (1), (2) and (3))

Therefore,

(5) If Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy. (from (T[A]) and (4))

Let us call this “the Expanded Argument.” This argument explains my knowledge of (5) purely in terms of my grasp of the meaning of [A] only if we assume that I know (T[A]) purely by virtue of grasping the meaning of [A]. Thus, assuming that mere grasp of the meaning of [A] justifies me in holding it true, it also justifies my belief that if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy, as long as mere grasp of the meaning of [A] justifies my belief that [A] is true if and only if, if Mia is happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy.

One might, however, argue that there is no need for the further step involved in deriving (5) from (4), since the Basic Argument, by itself, shows that I am justified in believing (5), simply by showing that I am justified in believing (4). For, when S in my idiolect means that p, believing that p is, in my case, a matter of my holding S to be true, and justifiably believing that p is, in my case, a matter of my justifiably holding S to be true. If this is right, then once we have explained how I can justifiably believe (4), we have thereby explained how I can justifiably believe (5).

But why is it plausible to think when S in my idiolect means that p, my believing that p is a matter of my holding S to be true? As I explained in section 4, this idea derives its plausibility from the assumption that when S in my idiolect means that p, my grasp of the meaning of S involves my knowledge that S is true if and only if p. If this is right, then the Basic Argument explains how I know (5) purely by virtue of grasping the meaning of [A], only on the assumption that my grasp of the meaning of [A] involves my knowledge of (T[A]).

Thus, whether by appeal to the Basic Argument or to the Expanded Argument, we can explain how mere grasp of the meaning of [A] justifies me in believing (5), only on the assumption that my grasp of the meaning of [A] involves my knowledge of (T[A]). More generally, suppose S means that p in a given speaker’s idiolect. Let us assume that we have successfully explained how the speaker’s grasp of the meaning of S justifies her belief that S is true (without drawing on the assumption that the speaker’s grasp of the
meaning of \( S \) justifies her belief that \( p \). This does put us in a position to explain how the speaker’s grasp of the meaning of \( S \) justifies her belief that \( p \), but only if we assume that the speaker’s grasp of the meaning of \( S \) involves her knowledge that \( S \) is true if and only if \( p \).

6. Knowledge of truth-conditions and grasp of ‘is true’

In light of these results, let us see what might be involved in trying to explain my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my sentences in terms of my grasp of the meaning of a pure disquotational truth predicate. Drawing on Boghossian’s account of how the meaning of logical terms is fixed, we could say that ‘is true’ has the meaning that it does in my idiolect by virtue of my stipulation that it is to have whatever meaning, if any, would make unproblematic instances of the T-schema come out true. One may reasonably wonder whether it would be legitimate to saddle disquotationalists with this sort of account of how the meanings of logical expressions (including pure disquotational truth locutions) are fixed. On the other hand, this is exactly the picture that McGee seems to be painting in the following passage:

A disquotational perspective provides the desired asymmetry between our situation, speaking our native tongue, and the situation of the field linguist trying to interpret [an alien language]. If our language does not yet contain any semantic terms, we are able to introduce the phrase “refers in the language I actually now speak” into the language by stipulating that the phrase is to be used in such a way that the (R) sentences are to be true. But stipulative definition is something that can only be done from the inside … We alone, of all the creatures in the universe, are able to stipulate how a word is to be used in our language, but other creatures are able to stipulate how words are to be used in their own languages. (McGee 2005, pp. 414-415)

Similarly, we could, on this picture, introduce the phrase ‘is true in the language I actually now speak’ into our language by stipulating that this phrase is to be used in such a way that unproblematic instances of the T-schema are to be true.

Consider the following unproblematic instance:

\[ [M] \quad \text{‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.} \]

Let us invoke the thesis of Implicit Definition to explain how mere grasp of \([M]\) justifies me in holding it to be true. Here is the Basic Argument, applied to this example:

(1) If ‘is true’ is to mean what it does, then unproblematic instances of the T-schema have to be true, for ‘is true’ means whatever logical object in fact makes unproblematic instances of the T-schema true.
(2) ‘Is true’ means what it does.
(3) [M] is an unproblematic instance of the T-schema.

Therefore,

(4) [M] is true.

What we really want to explain, however, is how mere grasp of the meaning of ‘is true’ justifies me in believing that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white (i.e., the proposition expressed by [M]). If we could draw on the assumption that my believing this is a matter of my holding [M] to be true, then showing this belief to be justified would simply involve showing that I am justified in holding [M] to be true. But again, if what I argued in section 4 is right, this assumption is only plausible if we assume that grasp of the meaning of [M] involves knowledge that [M] is true if and only if (‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white).

Alternatively, we can try to justify my belief that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white by appeal to the following Expanded Argument:

(1) If ‘is true’ is to mean what it does, then unproblematic instances of the T-schema have to be true, for ‘is true’ means whatever logical object in fact makes unproblematic instances of the T-schema true.
(2) ‘Is true’ means what it does.
(3) [M] is an unproblematic instance of the T-schema.

(T_M) [M] is true if and only if (‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white).

(4) [M] is true. (from (1), (2) and (3))

Therefore,

(5) ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. (from (T_M) and (4))

As already explained with respect to the previous example, this argument would show my belief in (5) to be justified purely on the basis of my grasp of the meaning of [M] only if I could be said to know (T_M) simply by virtue of grasping the meaning of [M].

Thus, whether we appeal to a version of the Basic Argument or of the Expanded Argument, the outcome is the same. Explaining my knowledge of the truth-conditions of ‘Snow is white’ in terms of my grasp of the meaning of its T-sentence (namely, [M]) involves explaining my knowledge of the truth-conditions of ‘Snow is white’ in terms of

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22 I am using parentheses to disambiguate the structure of this sentence.
my knowledge of the truth-conditions of its T-sentence. More generally, explaining my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my object-level sentences (sentences that are, on the face of it, not about language) in terms of my grasp of the meaning of a pure disquotational truth predicate involves explaining my knowledge of the truth-conditions of these sentences in terms of my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my T-sentences. Therefore, the attempt to so explain my knowledge of truth-conditions fails, simply because it involves explaining my knowledge of the truth-conditions of some of my sentences by presupposing my knowledge of the truth-conditions of others. Even worse, the sentences knowledge of whose truth-conditions is being presupposed (namely, my T-sentences) contain the sentences knowledge of whose truth-conditions is purportedly being explained (namely, my object-level sentences). But it is hard to see how my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my T-sentences could be more fundamental than my knowledge of the truth-conditions of the object-level sentences that they contain.

Here is another way to see why my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my sentences cannot be explained in terms of my grasp of the meaning of a pure disquotational truth predicate. The alleged account I just sketched would explain my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my object-level sentences in terms of my grasp of the meanings of my T-sentences only if my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my T-sentences could itself be explained in terms of my grasp of their meanings. But it is hard to see how my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my T-sentences could be so explained unless my grasp of the meanings of my T-sentences simply involved knowledge of their truth-conditions. And it seems arbitrary to hold that my grasp of the meaning of my T-sentences involves knowledge of their truth-conditions, while denying that my grasp of the meaning of my other sentences (in particular, my object-level sentences) involves knowledge of their truth-conditions. But if we do take grasp of the meanings of my sentences, in general, to involve knowledge of their truth-conditions, then we can explain my knowledge of the truth-conditions of each of my sentences simply in terms of my grasp of its meaning, thus dispensing with a Boghossian-style analytic explanation of this knowledge.23

23 As a matter of fact, I think we can explain a speaker’s knowledge of the truth of unproblematic instances of the T-schema simply in terms of her grasp of their meanings, even if we cannot explain the speaker’s knowledge of the truths expressed by these instances in terms of her grasp of their meanings. In other words, I think these instances are analytic in Boghossian’s epistemic sense. For instance, consider [M]. If we take grasp of the meaning of a sentence to involve knowledge of its truth-conditions, then my grasp of the meaning of [M] explains my knowledge of the fact that [M] is true if and only if (‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white). But since the sentence ‘Snow is white’ is used in [M] (on the right-hand side of its biconditional), my grasp of the meaning of [M] depends on my grasp of the meaning of ‘Snow is white.’ And since grasp of meaning involves knowledge of truth-conditions, my grasp of the meaning of ‘Snow is white’ explains my knowledge that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. Thus, since my grasp of the meaning of [M] explains both my knowledge that [M] is true if and only if (‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white) and my knowledge that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white, it explains my knowledge that [M] is true.
Here is the upshot. Whether or not we think that our knowledge of certain facts can be explained in terms of our grasp of the meanings of the sentences we use to state these facts, our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences is too basic to be amenable to this kind of explanation. For, as I explained, knowledge of the truth-conditions of our own sentences is invoked in any purported explanation of our knowledge of facts in terms of our grasp of the logic, conventions or stipulations governing our use of words.

7. A more charitable reading?

If this is right, Boghossian’s strategy for explaining our knowledge of certain truths in terms of our grasp of the meanings of the sentences we use in stating these truths is simply not applicable, when our target explanandum is our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences.

One may wonder, however, if there is any point to arguing for this conclusion here, since Boghossian’s strategy does not even seem available to Field and McGee, if we take disquotationalism seriously.

Here is why. Helping ourselves to a pre-existing notion of truth, we could introduce a pure disquotational truth predicate ‘is true\textsubscript{pd}’ into our language by stipulating that that ‘is true\textsubscript{pd}’ is only meaningfully applied to sentences of our own language, and that all unproblematic instances of the T-schema <‘s’ is true\textsubscript{pd} if and only if s> are true. But this cannot be what the disquotationalist is really doing, since his main claim is that our primary notion of truth just is the pure disquotational one, and that we have fully captured the content of this notion by specifying the schema governing the use of ‘is true’ in our language. If this is right, then the use of ‘is true’ in our language could not be spelled out by invoking an antecedently intelligible notion of truth. Thus, if, as McGee contemplates, ‘is true’ is introduced into our language by way of a stipulation concerning how it is to be used, the relevant stipulation cannot consist in the decision to use ‘is true’ in such a way that (unproblematic) instances of the T-schema come out true. For, to repeat, this would involve specifying the role of the pure disquotational truth predicate by appeal to a pre-existing notion of truth.

How else, though, is the disquotationalist meant to specify the role of ‘is true’? Field seems more concerned than McGee with trying to avoid semantic vocabulary in characterizing the role of ‘is true.’ He claims, in favor of his account of this role, that it “provides a way to understand disquotational truth independent of any nondisquotational concept of truth or truth-conditions (and independent of any concept of proposition).”

This suggests that he does recognize the need for a

\footnote{Field 2001, p. 106.}
conception of the meaning or role of ‘is true’ that does not invoke any antecedently intelligible notion of truth.

As we have seen, Field spells out the role of ‘is true’ in terms of the “cognitive equivalence” of sentences\(^{25}\) in which it occurs and sentences in which it does not.\(^{26}\)

Connected to the disquotationalist’s notion of cognitive equivalence is some notion of analyticity or conceptual necessity. Given the cognitive equivalence of each sentence \(s\) that we understand with the sentence in which the pure disquotational ‘is true’ is applied to a quotation name for \(s\), Field characterizes instances of the T-schema as “conceptually necessary,”\(^{27}\) “more or less indefeasible,”\(^{28}\) or even as “more or less ‘analytic’ or ‘logically true’ for [us],”\(^{29}\) and seems to be using these labels interchangeably.

Just as with the notion of cognitive equivalence, we need to make sure that the idea of a sentence’s being “conceptually necessary” or “logically true for us” does not smuggle in a pre-existing, unexplained notion of truth. The disquotationalist thus needs to give us a bit more elucidation on how he could be understanding these notions, if not in terms of truth. For instance, “conceptually necessary” here cannot be elucidated in terms of “necessarily true,” and “logically true” or “analytic” cannot really mean, respectively, “true by virtue of logic alone” and “known to be true by virtue of knowledge of

\(^{25}\) Is ‘is true,’ as Field understands it, a predicate of sentence-types (computationally rather than orthographically individuated, as Field insists) or of utterances? He sends us mixed signals: on the one hand, he spells out his account in terms of the cognitive equivalence of sentences in which the truth predicate is used and sentences in which it is not. On the other hand, when handling ambiguity and indexicals, he claims that “strictly speaking,” ‘is true’ as he is thinking of it is a predicate of utterances rather than sentence types (“Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content,” in Field 2001, pp. 134-137).

Despite the problems posed by context-sensitivity, however, Field’s notion of cognitive equivalence makes better sense if its relata are construed as sentence types rather than utterances. For as we will see, Field spells out cognitive equivalence for sentences in terms of their intersubstitutability in the context of larger sentences. It is hard to make sense of this if ‘sentence’ is interpreted as ‘utterance’ (rather than ‘sentence type’), since it is sentences, not their utterances, that occur, and can be substituted for one another, in the context of larger sentences.

\(^{26}\) Similarly, McGee, who credits Quine with the disquotational conception of truth, characterizes the role of the pure disquotational ‘is true’ as follows: “Quine […] thought of suffixing the words “is true” to the quotation name of an English sentence as undoing the effect of the quotation marks” (McGee 2005, p. 410). We could put this by saying that for Quine, the “effect” of suffixing ‘is true’ to the quotation name of an English sentence \(s\) is a sentence that is “cognitively equivalent” to \(s\).

\(^{27}\) Field 2001, p. 114.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 173.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 222.
meaning.”\textsuperscript{30} How, then, is the disquotationalist understanding these notions, if not in terms of truth? Field does not say much about what cognitive equivalence comes to, though we do find him sketching his “own preferred reading” of this notion in a footnote:

My own preferred reading, for what it’s worth, is that to call two sentences that a person understands ‘cognitively equivalent’ for that person is to say that the person’s inferential procedures license a fairly direct inference from any sentence containing an occurrence of one to the corresponding sentence with an occurrence of the other substituted for it; with the stipulation, of course, that the occurrence to be substituted for is not within the context of quotation marks or an intentional attitude construction … I would also take the claim of cognitive equivalence to imply that the inferences are more or less indefeasible. (More specifically, that they are empirically indefeasible, and close to indefeasible on conceptual grounds as well, and that the person is not in possession of defeaters for them).\textsuperscript{31}

The relevant notion of cognitive equivalence for sentences is, then, some notion of sameness of conceptual or inferential role, where inferential role is to be understood independently of any notion of truth. Accordingly, in characterizing a sentence as “indefeasible,”\textsuperscript{32} the disquotationalist is describing an aspect of the inferential role of the sentence for us. An indefeasible sentence is one that enjoys a certain privileged status in our inferential practices. Clearly, some notion of a speaker’s “acceptance” of a sentence is playing a crucial—albeit implicit—role here. Strictly speaking, it is our acceptance of a sentence, rather than the sentence itself, that can be said to be or not to be “indefeasible” or “unrevisable.” Or, if we could speak of truth, we would say that it is our belief that a sentence is true, or our “holding it to be true” that is or is not indefeasible.

Whether we can really make sense of the relevant notion of “acceptance” of a sentence without helping ourselves to a notion of truth, is an important and difficult question.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} This might be why Field encloses the latter two expressions in quotes, and speaks of the relevant sentences as being “‘analytic’ for us,” or “‘logically true’ for us” (rather than simply as “analytic” or “logically true”), as if to avoid suggesting that a non-deflationary notion of analyticity (or logical truth) is doing any work here.

\textsuperscript{31} Field 2001, p. 106, fn. 2.

\textsuperscript{32} Field characterizes unproblematic instances of the disquotation schema as “more of less indefeasible,” that is, as “empirically indefeasible, and close to indefeasible on empirical grounds,” in light of the semantic paradoxes (see Field 2001, p. 106, fn. 2). To simplify exposition, I am ignoring this qualification.

\textsuperscript{33} In particular, this would involve making sense of a crucial distinction between two ways of “accepting” a sentence, corresponding to the distinction between believing (or holding) the sentence to be true and wanting it to be true. It would also involve distinguishing between acceptance in the sense of believing-
The disquotationalist needs to be able to do this, since he needs to be able to spell out the role of the pure disquotational truth predicate without invoking any pre-existing notion of truth or of truth-conditions. But my goal here is not to assess the prospects of a successful deflationism about truth, but only its compatibility with the idea that competent speakers know the truth-conditions of their sentences. So I will grant, for the sake of argument, that the disquotationalist has a suitable notion of acceptance of a sentence that does not depend on a prior understanding of truth.

In light of these restrictions, let us consider [M] again. Here is what the Basic Argument looks like, if we replace talk of truth with talk of indefeasible acceptability:

(1) If ‘is true’ is to mean what it does, then my acceptance of unproblematic instances of the T-schema has to be indefeasible, for ‘is true’ has whatever conceptual role in fact makes my acceptance of unproblematic instances of the T-schema indefeasible.
(2) ‘Is true’ means what it does.
(3) [M] is an unproblematic instance of the T-schema.

Therefore,

(4) My acceptance of [M] is indefeasible.

What this argument explains is how mere grasp of [M] justifies me in taking my acceptance of [M] to be indefeasible. But what we want to explain is how mere grasp of [M] justifies me in believing that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. How could a disquotationalist explain this?

There is no obvious way of generating a suitable version of the Expanded Argument here, since there is no obvious way to get from (4) to

(5) ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.

For, recall that the disquotationalist cannot characterize acceptance of a sentence as a matter of taking it to be true. But as with the previous examples, and assuming our Basic Argument does what it is supposed to do, appeal to an Expanded Argument might not necessary here. Let us assume, then, that our Basic Argument successfully explains how mere grasp of the meaning of [M] justifies me in taking my acceptance of [M] to be indefeasible. Could explaining this amount to explaining how mere grasp of

true and acceptance in Stalnaker’s broader sense of “treat[ing] … as true for some reason” (Stalnaker 2002, p. 716).
the meaning of [M] justifies me in believing the proposition expressed by [M]—namely, that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white?

It would, if we could make sense of the idea that believing that p is, in my case, just a matter of accepting ‘p.’ For if believing that p is, in my case, a matter of accepting ‘p,’ justifiably believing that p is, in my case, a matter of justifiably accepting ‘p.’ If this is right, there is no more to explaining how mere grasp of [M] justifies my belief that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white, than explaining how mere grasp of [M] justifies my acceptance of [M]. One small fly in the ointment here is that what the Basic Argument directly explains is how grasp of the meaning of [M] justifies me in taking my acceptance of [M] to be indefeasible, rather than explaining how this grasp justifies me in accepting [M]. But this does not seem to be a serious difficulty, since it is plausible that if I am justified in taking my acceptance of a given sentence to be indefeasible, then I am justified in simply accepting this sentence. If this is right, the Basic argument can be said to explain how mere grasp of [M] justifies me in accepting it. And if my believing that p is a matter of my accepting ‘p,’ what we would thereby have explained is how mere grasp of [M] justifies me in believing that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.

But can the disquotationalist appeal to the assumption that believing that p is, in my case, a matter of accepting ‘p’? Yes he can, simply because he is free to define belief in terms of a prior notion of acceptance of a sentence. And this is exactly what Field does, by putting forward his “linguistic view of meaning and content attributions.” On Field’s linguistic view, in saying that S in X’s language means that p, I am simply saying that S “has the same meaning characteristics as the meaning characteristics of my actual use of [‘p’].” And in saying that S believes that p, I am saying that X “accepts a sentence (or mental representation) which has a role in her psychology like the role that the sentence ‘p’ (or a mental representation that [I] associate with it) plays in [mine].” In particular, on this view, in saying that my own sentence ‘p’ means that p, what I am saying is that ‘p’ as I understand it has the meaning characteristics it actually has, or, more simply, that ‘p’ as I understand it means what it actually does. And in saying that I believe that p, I am saying that I accept the sentence ‘p.’

34 Field 2001, p. 158.

35 Ibid., p. 159. Field goes on to “refine” his proposal, by suggesting that we replace the appeal to sameness of meaning characteristics with an appeal to a suitable notion of similarity or equivalence of meaning characteristics. These details do not matter for my purposes here.

36 Ibid., p. 163.

37 This means that regardless of how I am using or understanding ‘p,’ I am taking ‘p’ to mean that p, since regardless of how I am understanding ‘p,’ I am taking ‘p’ to means what it actually does.
The disquotationalist is, then, using a primitive notion of acceptance of a sentence and defining belief in terms of it. Since he is doing this without relying on any pre-existing notion of truth, his assumption that believing that p is, in my case, a matter of accepting ‘p’ is perfectly in line with his commitment to the primacy of pure disquotational truth.

The upshot is this. If we accept disquotationalism along with Field’s linguistic view of content attributions, my grasp of the meaning of ‘is true’ does, in some sense, justify my beliefs about the truth-conditions of my sentences, or explain my knowledge of these truth-conditions. For, on this view, there is nothing more to my having the beliefs I do about the conditions under which my sentences are true than my accepting unproblematic instances of the T-schema. For example, there is nothing more to my believing that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white than my accepting the sentence ‘“Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.’ Therefore, there is nothing more to my justifiably believing what I do about the truth-conditions of my sentences than my justifiably accepting unproblematic instances of the T-schema. But my indefeasible, and therefore justified acceptance of these instances is constitutive of my grasp of the meaning of ‘is true,’ which, on this account, means that my justifiably believing what I do about the conditions under which my sentences are true is itself constitutive of my grasp of the meaning of ‘is true.’

Recall the question I posed in my introduction:

Can disquotationalism really explain our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences, or can it only explain our entitlement to assert unproblematic instances of the T-schema?

The conclusion we have arrived at is that the disquotationalist can, in some sense, explain how mere grasp of ‘is true’ justifies our beliefs about the truth-conditions of our sentences. This is because on the disquotationalist’s view of belief (or at least, one disquotationalist’s view of belief), there is nothing more to our believing what we do about the truth-conditions of our sentences than our “accepting” unproblematic instances of the T-schema.

The disquotationalist’s position on the above question, then, seems to be that it presents us with a false choice. For, on the line of response I have just considered, the disquotationalist takes himself to have explained our knowledge of the truth-conditions

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38 We may reasonably wonder if this deflationary conception of belief is really compatible with deflationists’ tendency to depict our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences as simply a trivial by-product of our linguistic competence, rather than as being constitutive of it (for instance, see Horwich 2005, pp. 69-70). If my indefeasible acceptance of (or my disposition to assert) unproblematic instances of the T-schema in application to sentences in my idiolect is constitutive of my grasp of ‘is true,’ then it is constitutive of my grasp of the meanings of these instances. So if my language contains the pure disquotational ‘is true,’ my indefeasible acceptance of unproblematic instances of the T-schema is, after all, constitutive of my linguistic competence, rather than being a by-product of it.
of our sentences simply by virtue of having explained our indefeasible acceptance of instances of the T-schema. His considered view, then, seems to be that there is nothing more to our so-called “knowledge” of the truth-conditions of our sentences than our entitlement to assert, and our indefeasible acceptance of, unproblematic instances of the T-schema.

If this is right, it means that the disquotationalist is ultimately deflating not just truth, but knowledge as well. In particular, his conception of belief does not seem to make room for a factive conception of knowledge. As knowledge attributions as usually understood, in describing X as knowing that p, I am claiming that p, though I am of course doing more than this: I am describing X as standing in some privileged relation to the fact that p—a relation that we can, for our purposes, think of as a matter of justifiably believing that p. Suppose we tried to hold on to both this feature of knowledge attributions and Field’s linguistic view of content attributions. Then our depiction of ourselves as knowing that p would involve a rather odd combination of two disparate claims: on the one hand, a claim about the world, or extra-linguistic reality (namely, that p), and on the other, a claim about our relation to a given sentence (e.g., that we are justified in accepting the sentence ‘p’), with nothing connecting the two. For, without construing acceptance of a sentence as a matter of holding it to be true, and invoking our knowledge of the fact that ‘p’ is true if and only if p, our acceptance of ‘p’ does not constitute our taking a stance on whether or not p. 39

In light of this, it would be more charitable to take the disquotationalist to be simply rejecting a factive conception of knowledge, rather than saddle him with the inchoate conception of knowledge I have just sketched. But this means that the disquotationalist is ultimately securing our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences only by reducing such knowledge to nothing more than our indefeasible (or justified) “acceptance” of certain sentences. His point, thus understood, is that a speaker’s so-called “knowledge of truth-conditions” is just a matter of her being able to use each sentence s of her idiolect interchangeably with the sentence in which ‘is true’ is attached to a quotation name for s. In particular, a speaker who “knows the truth-conditions of her sentences” in this deflated sense can affix the predicate ‘is true’ to the quotation name of a sentence that she accepts and can conversely remove ‘is true’ and disquote sentences mentioned in assertions of the form <‘s’ is true>. Beyond this ability, there is nothing more to a speaker’s knowledge of truth-conditions, and thus nothing to explain, or justify, in terms of the disquotational account of ‘is true.’

If this is right, the disquotationalist’s answer to the difficulties facing inflationist approaches to truth is not the hopeless attempt I have made it out to be, to explain a speaker’s knowledge of truth-conditions—in a non-deflated, factive sense of

39 The point I am making here depends on a factive conception of knowledge, but it does not depend on thinking of knowledge as anything more than justified true belief. My complaint is not that the disquotationalist’s conception of knowledge leaves unconnected the fact that p with the provenance or justification of our belief that p.
knowledge—in terms of her competence with a pure disquotational truth predicate. Rather, it is a matter of simply embracing a deflated picture of linguistic competence as involving nothing more than syntactic manipulation. In saying this, I do not mean to be simply drawing attention to the fact that deflationists cannot make sense of linguistic competence as essentially involving knowledge of truth-conditions. This is an outcome that most deflationists proudly accept. My point is that, having committed to a non-truth-conditional conception of linguistic competence, the deflationist cannot then go on to explain our knowledge of truth-conditions as a by-product of this competence.

8. Conclusion

To echo McGee’s words, how is it that, unmistakably, ‘Snow is white’ as I understand it is true if and only if snow is white, even if my linguistic usage (or the linguistic usage of my community) fails to determine this as being the case? If what I have argued in this paper is right, disquotationalism cannot adequately answer this sort of question. It cannot explain my knowledge of the truth-conditions of my sentences in terms of the logic of ‘is true,’ though it can characterize my indefeasible acceptance of unproblematic instances of the T-schema as being part of the logic of this expression.

Does disquotationalism allow us to think of competent speakers as knowing the truth-conditions of their own sentences? One might argue that the above considerations are orthogonal to this question. For, from the result that disquotationalism cannot itself justify our assumptions about the truth-conditions of our sentences, it does not seem to follow that disquotationalism is incompatible with the idea that linguistic competence involves knowledge of truth-conditions. After all, it is not clear how, or whether, more inflationary approaches to truth can explain a competent speaker’s knowledge of truth-conditions. Why, then, should the disquotationalist’s inability to explain such knowledge be particularly troublesome?

Here is why. If we begin with a conception of meaning that encapsulates truth-conditions, and a conception of linguistic competence as involving (propositional) knowledge of meaning, then a speaker’s knowledge of truth-conditions is built into our depiction of her as linguistically competent. From this perspective, any threat to our

40 As we have seen, one motivation for the disquotational account of truth is the inflationist’s perceived inability to explain the special status of our beliefs about what our own sentences mean and the conditions under which they are true—particularly in the face of various indeterminacy arguments. Whether or not disquotationalism succeeds in meeting this explanatory demand is beside the point here; it is enough to point out that if there is any difficulty here, it is not peculiar to disquotationalism.

41 Note, however, that not all inflationists about sentential truth believe that knowledge of truth-conditions is essential to linguistic competence. Soames, for instance, adopts a conception of meaning that does, in some sense, encapsulate, or at least determine, truth-conditions, but he denies that knowledge of truth-conditions has any part to play in characterizing linguistic competence (Soames 1989).
knowledge of the truth-conditions of our sentences constitutes a threat to our very
conception of ourselves as linguistically competent. By contrast, because a
disquotationalist has to begin with a conception of meaning that does not encapsulate
truth-conditions, whatever ground he has for attributing to competent speakers
knowledge of the truth-conditions of their sentences will have to be derivable from his
account of the role of ‘is true’ as a pure disquotational truth predicate. As I have argued,
however, the disquotational account of the role of ‘is true’ cannot help establish a
competent speaker’s knowledge of the truth-conditions of her sentences. We can
conclude, then, that disquotationalism does not allow us to think of linguistic
competence as involving knowledge of truth-conditions.

Before closing, I want to consider one final response on behalf of the disquotationalist.
Here is one way of trying to avoid the choice I have presented between portraying the
disquotationalist as embracing a skeptical view of meaning, or taking him to engage in
the hopeless attempt to explain our knowledge of truth-conditions in terms of our grasp
of ‘is true.’ My whole argument began as an attempt to make sense of the
disquotationalist’s apparent goal of explaining our knowledge of facts about truth in
terms of our grasp of the meaning of a pure disquotational truth predicate. In particular,
I have focused on the disquotationalist’s claim that it is part of the logic of ‘is true’ that,
for instance, ‘snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. One possibility I have
not considered is that when Field and McGee say such things, they do not really mean
to be explaining either facts about truth, or our knowledge of such facts, in terms of
facts about our use of ‘is true.’ Rather, talk of the logic of ‘is true’ might simply be a
way of talking about truth itself. On this reading, when the disquotationalist says “It is
part of the logic of ‘is true’ that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white,”
what he is really saying is that our knowledge that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if
snow is white counts as logical knowledge—or, is akin to our knowledge of such facts
as that if Mia is Happy and Tom is bored, then Mia is happy. Now this claim is
plausible, if only because of the fundamental role that our knowledge of the truth-
conditions of our own sentences plays in our cognitive lives. But if what I have argued
in this paper is right, we cannot do justice to this role if we think of our grasp of truth as
exhausted by our competent use of a pure disquotational truth predicate. The fact, if it
is one, that our knowledge of the truth-conditions of our own sentences counts as
logical knowledge does not help support a deflationary conception of truth.

While there might be some question as to whether, or how, we know what we think we know about the
conditions under which our sentences are true, there is, from this perspective, no problem of explaining
our knowledge of truth-conditions in terms of our linguistic competence.

In fact, in other places, Field himself expresses skepticism about the prospects of justifying any of our
beliefs in terms of our grasp of the meanings of our words. See Field 2000 and 2005. This raises the
question of how his claims in “Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content” are to be understood, if not
as I am understanding them here. I should note, however, that “Deflationist Views of Meaning and
Content” was first published in 1994, and thus, as far as I know, predates Field’s arguments against an
analytic explanation of the a priori.
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