The Prospects for Normative Metaphysics: Analyticity with Substantive Truth

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Abstract

There is a now-familiar "problem of creeping minimalism", which concerns the prospects for distinguishing two intuitively very different meta-ethical views, namely expressivism and realism. Given the appropriate "minimalist" or "deflationary" understandings of semantic terms such as 'truth', 'refers', and the like, expressivist views of normativity entail many claims that appear to be characteristic of realism. The consensus is that even if they agree on these characteristic claims, realists will explain why they are true differently. These are *explanatory solutions* to the problem of creeping minimalism. This paper is about the viability of explanatory solutions. I argue, contra Taylor (2019), that the realist does not need to accept a deflationary conception of truth and reference, in order to acknowledge the force of the problem of creeping minimalism. The realist needs something weaker, namely an account of why the deflationary notions of truth and reference do not simply *change the subject*. I develop a realist view which grants, with deflationists, that our use of 'true', 'refers', etc. treats certain claims as analytic. However, the realism on offer adds that these analytic claims have metaphysically substantive, non-trivial explanations for why they are true. The result is a realism that concedes that expressivists are not changing the subject away from normative truth and reference, without closing off the viability of an explanatory solution to the problem of creeping minimalism.

1 Expressivism

An *expressivist* view of normative language does not explain the meaning of 'ought' by saying what it refers to. Instead it explains the meaning of 'ought' by saying what it is to think that one ought to do something. In order to know what 'one ought to give to the poor' means, one needs to know what it is to think that one ought to give to the poor. 'One ought to give to the poor' expresses this thought.

According to Gibbard (2003), this thought is a planning-state. It is a state that rules out acting in certain ways—*viz.*, actions that involve not giving to the poor.

This is a normative judgment about charitable giving, which, on the expressivist view, expresses an all-things-considered decision.[1]

The expressivist view is to be contrasted with *truth-conditional* theories of meaning. The usual way of explaining what a descriptive sentence means is to give the conditions under which it is true. To know what 'Newman wrote a book' means requires knowing that it is true just in case Newman wrote a book. Expressivists decline to explain the meaning of normative sentences truth-conditionally. Rather, they explain what a normative sentence means by telling us what state of mind it expresses. The expressed state of mind gives the conditions under which a normative sentence may be used: one appropriately uses the sentence 'one ought to give to the poor' just in case one is in the state of mind of planning to give to the poor. The theory of meaning is *use-conditional*, rather than truth-conditional.[2]

The foregoing is just a basic sketch of a familiar expressivist view about normative language. One important first observation is that expressivism, so characterized, appears to be an importantly different view from standard realist views of normativity. A realist view which holds that facts about obligation are a part of reality does not—or, at least has no reason to avoid—a truth-conditional explanation of the meaning of normative sentences. For the realist, the sentence 'one ought to give to the poor' contains a term that refers to a part of reality, namely the property of obligation, which is instantiated by some acts and not others. Its truth-conditions involve the instantiation of this property by the act of giving to the poor.[3]

2   A (first) complication: creeping minimalism

The foregoing are issues in (meta-)semantics,[4] but it is natural to extend them to theses about the metaphysics of normativity. In explaining the truth-conditions for 'one ought to give to the poor', the realist appeals to the conditions under which the sentence is true. The expressivist's explanation of the meaning of the same

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[1] I am relying on a number of simplifying assumptions here. (i) I follow Gibbard's expressivist theory, although similar points could be made using the theory developed in Blackburn (1988). (ii) I will treat the English term 'ought', and its subject-matter, obligation, as the central normative term and property, respectively. (iii) Strictly speaking, on Gibbard's view, the thought expressed by an 'ought' judgment is a state that "rules out" a set of maximally specific plans, which are represented as "hyperplanners" (Gibbard 2003: 54). (iv) Although more familiar in the meta-ethics literature, *moral* judgments are a more complicated case, since they involve more sophisticated patterns of planning. To think that one morally ought to give to the poor is to feel a "guilt-tinged aversion" at the thought of oneself not giving, to be prepared to blame others for not giving, etc. I do not believe that any of these assumptions affects the main theses of this paper.
[2] Silk (2015: 48). Perhaps, for reasons involving logic and general semantic virtues, expressivists must explain all meaning use-conditionally. See Schroeder (2008).
[3] For different views on the relationship between meaning and truth-conditions, see Davidson (1967) and Soames (1987). I will remain neutral between these and other descriptivist theories of meaning.
[4] Cf. Chrisman (2015) and Silk (2016) for the distinction between semantics and meta-semantics in this context.

sentence requires no such resources. So, at a first pass, it might be tempting to say that, on the expressivist view, normative sentences are not true, and normative terms do not refer to anything. Some early proto-expressivists characterized their view in this way.[5]

There is widespread consensus that this is not an accurate characterization of expressivism. The truth-conditions of a sentence, including a normative sentence, are a biconditional:

'one ought to give to the poor' is true iff one ought to give to the poor.

The expressivist will accept the right-hand side of the biconditional (if not, this is a moral failing, not a systematic consequence of expressivism). What more is involved in accepting the left-hand side?

According to a "minimalist" conception of truth, nothing. To claim that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true introduces no new substantial commitments over and above what one is committed to when one says that one ought to give to the poor. So accepting, or thinking, the left-hand-side of the biconditional does not require anything more than what accepting, or thinking, the right-hand-side involves. If expressivists can accept 'one ought to give to the poor', then they can also accept that the sentence is true.[6]

This leaves us with a measure of parity between realism and expressivism. For every truth-condition that the realist assigns to a normative sentence, the expressivist can agree that the sentence in question has the truth-condition. Whatever differences there are between the views, we can't say that these are differences over normative truth, or differences over whether normative sentences have truth-conditions.

However, it does not appear that there is parity across the board. Recall the differences in why the expressivist and realist can accept the same claims about the truth-conditions of 'one ought to give to the poor'. For the realist, the truth-condition explains the meaning of 'one ought to give to the poor'. For the expressivist, the meaning of 'one ought to give to the poor' is explained in terms of its use-conditions: it is appropriate to use the sentence when one plans to give to the poor. The truth-condition is an epiphenomenal consequence of the meaning of the sentence, which is explained in other terms.

There is wide consensus over the general idea that, even if a minimalist account of truth does allow the sentences the expressivist accepts to "creep" in to realist territory, there will still be differences over how realists and expressivists *explain* the acceptability of the relevant sentences. An account of this kind, in some form, can be found in Gibbard (2003: 187), Blackburn (2007: 163), Dreier (2004: 41),

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[5]E.g., Ayer (1952).

[6]Of course accepting the biconditional requires not only accepting each side of the biconditional, but also accepting the complex sentence which embeds both sides. I will assume that worries about the Frege-Geach problem have been solved for the expressivist. See Schroeder (2008) for more discussion of the Frege-Geach problem.

and Dunaway (2016). Differences arise over the precise nature of the explanatory relation. For instance, Dreier argues that only on the realist view do moral properties explain the content of normative beliefs. Blackburn says that moral beliefs, on the realist view, have the function of representing moral properties. Dunaway claims that only on the realist view do normative properties play the explanatory role characteristic of highly elite (or, metaphysically privileged) properties.

Let us say that all of these claims offer an *explanatory solution* to the problem of distinguishing realism from expressivism.[7] The difference doesn't necessarily lie in which first-order about truth and reference claims are compatible with each view, but rather in the explanation of why these claims hold. Explanatory solutions are attractive, given that the distinction between realism and expressivism cannot be captured merely by claims about what the truth-conditions for normative sentences are.

There are parallel issues that arise for other semantic notions such as reference and satisfaction. Expressivists will be able to say that 'ought' refers to a property, namely obligation. The resulting issues will be the same: an explanatory solution regarding the difference between the realist and expressivist views of reference will be similarly attractive. I will return to this issue in more detail later.

But there is a prior issue which deserves more attention. If we have granted minimalist conceptions of truth and reference, then we appear to have gone in for a theory on which there is nothing involving truth-conditions to be explained. If truth is minimal, then the truth predicate in ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true' adds nothing more to what 'one ought to give to the poor says'. So, there is nothing for the realist to explain in a different manner than the expressivist. By initially granting a minimalist conception of truth to the expressivist, we have deprived ourselves of an explanatory resource, and must deny that there is any possibility of offering an explanatory solution to the problem of creeping minimalism. David Taylor (2019) has argued, in much greater detail, for a family of theses along these lines.

I will save the details for the next section. First it is worth emphasizing how striking of a conclusion this would be. An explanatory solution of the kind I have described appears to offer the following "moderate" solution to the problem of creeping minimalism:

The Moderate Solution Realists and expressivists do not differ over whether normative sentences are true. Instead, they differ over claims about explanatory priority. For the realist, the truth-conditions for normative sentences explain what these sentences mean. Expressivists reject these explanations.

Instead, we are forced to adopt one of following two extreme positions:

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[7]Cf. the "explanation explanation" in Dreier (2004: 39).

Extreme Solution #1: Truth is not minimal; consequently expressivsts fail to show that they can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is a true sentence, since they rely on a minimalist theory of truth when doing so.

Extreme Solution #2: Since truth is minimal, expressivists can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is a true sentence. This precludes non-minimal accounts of the meaning of 'one ought to give to the poor', which give an explanatory role to normative truth. There is not a difference, even at the level of explanatory priority, between realism and expressivism.

Are we really forced to adopt one of the Extreme Solutions, rather than the Moderate Solution? It is difficult to answer this question without a more detailed account of what the minimalist conception of truth, and related notions, says. In the next section I will present one version of this approach to truth here, which I call, following Taylor (2019), a *deflationist* conception of truth. The account will follow, in outline, the account Taylor uses to argue that we need to adopt one of the Extreme Solutions. It will also allow us to see where, precisely, the deflationary account is unsatisfactory for a realist, and how to chart a course to maintaining the Moderate Solution to the problem of creeping minimalism.

3 Deflationism about truth

Before diving into the details of a deflationary view, a few caveats: I do not wish to legislate how a "deflationary" conception of truth must be understood. Moreover, I do not wish to claim that there is only one view of truth that can be called "deflationary". I will present one deflationary view of truth here. This is partially for expository reasons—the aim of this paper is not to survey theories of truth. There is also a more important reason: the components of the deflationary view I outline below will serve to highlight a general strategy for maintaining the Moderate Solution.

One way to implement deflationism about truth is as follows. Begin with the following schema governing the truth-predicate for sentences:

(T) 'p' is true iff p

Assume (although this skates over some important issues) that we have resolved what the eligible substitution-instances of (T) are, and, moreover, that one of the instances of (T) is the normative sentence 'one ought to give to the poor'.

A deflationist view that allows expressivists to accept instances of (T) needs to show, roughly, that what 'true' adds to the left-hand-side of (T) does not make it claim more than what the right-hand-side claims.[8] A first step to articulating this

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[8] As stated, the left-hand side includes information about and English sentence, while the right-hand side does not. This is an important difference (Soames 1997: 22) but I will gloss over it in what follows. It is natural to think that the extra information about the meanings of the English sentence in the left-hand side is not what would make it unacceptable to an expressivist.

idea is to add that, not only are each side of (T) materially equivalent, accepting instances of (T) is warranted in some way by simply grasping the meaning of the word 'true'. That is, (T) is not only true, it is analytic:

(T1) All there is to the meaning of 'true' is its role in making (T) analytic.

I will reserve the term 'analytic' for a purely linguistic fact concerning how a term is used by a linguistic community. In particular, I will say, (T) is analytic because accepting it constitutes the competence-conditions for 'true', as a competent speaker of English must be primitively disposed to accept instances of the schema (T).[9] This separates the linguistic status of analytic claims from their metaphysical status, where the latter concerns what makes the relevant claims *true*.[10] It is true that the deflationist will also think that there is something closely related to the analyticity of (T), that also accounts for its truth. I will return to this below.

The claim that (T) is analytic has three components. First, in general, a competent speaker must *accept* the instances of (T); to accept p and at the same time deny, or wonder whether to accept that 'p' is true, would manifest lack of competence with the truth-predicate. Second, one must only be *disposed* to accept these instances; some people after theoretical reflection (perhaps after listening to lectures on non-classical logics) decide not to accept some instances. Whether this position is the right one or not, they remain competent so long as they retain the disposition to accept the instances.[11] Finally, the disposition must be a *primitive* one, not based on further inferences or reasoning. One does not know p and come to learn that 'p' is true by deriving it from some intermediary premise. The inference from p to the claim that 'p' is true is, for a competent speaker, a single step.

This notion of analyticity does not entail truth. As Matti Eklund (2002) has emphasized, it could be a competence requirement that one be primitively disposed to accept the instances of (T), but, as a consequence of one's competence, one is disposed to accept some falsehoods. In general, the competence-conditions imposed by a linguistic community need not involve acceptance of truths. Thus the analyticity claim (T1) does not settle whether the instances of (T) are, in fact, true.

What guarantees that speakers who are competent with 'true' will not only accept instances of (T), but in addition the world cooperates—viz., truth attaches to 'p' in all and only the cases where p? (T1) holds that our language does not *treat* truth as if it has some substantive additional nature. This is not itself equivalent to

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[9]See Horwich (1990: 36) for a version of this idea.

[10]This is related to the distinction between "metaphysical" and "epistemological" analyticity discussed in Boghossiaan (1997). Tappenden (1993: 240) calls these sentences "pre-analytic". See Eklund (2002: 253). Again, I do not aim to outline the only way to elaborate a deflationary conception of truth here. What follows is one conception of deflationary truth, which I have deliberately selected to frame how the Extreme Solutions of the previous section can be avoided.

[11]Eklund (2002) says the disposition generates "pull" for competent speakers.

the claim that truth does not actually have a substantive nature. The deflationist view adds to this by holding that our language is not misleading in this respect. All there is to truth is whatever makes it the case that we can accept instances of (T) on the basis of their analyticity—that is, without further reasoning or inference.

It is tempting, but not strictly speaking correct, to put this point by saying that (T1) exhausts the nature of truth. (T1) only says something about the meaning of 'true', a linguistic item. Truth, however, is not a linguistic item—it is, allegedly, the property of sentences that the term 'true' refers to. We need to be more careful, to avoid conflating facts about the word 'true' with the nature of truth.[12]

One version of the deflationist idea is that the behavior of 'true' is indicative of the nature of the non-linguistic item, truth, in the following way. *Knowing* the meaning of 'true', and thereby knowing that instances of (T) are analytic, is sufficient for knowing the nature of truth. The claim that there is no significant metaphysical nature to truth is then the idea that there is nothing further to know about the nature of truth, beyond what someone who knows (T1) knows. In order to know the nature of truth, it is sufficient to know (T1).[13] This is (T2):

(T2) Knowing the nature of truth requires nothing more than knowing (T1)

Consider what the status of (T2) would be if there were a substantial metaphysical nature to truth: in order to know about the nature, one would have to know something about truth, in order to know the nature. Simply knowing how 'true' works in English—that is, knowing (T1)—would not be sufficient. But, according to (T2), all one has to do to learn about the nature of truth is to know a linguistic fact about 'true'. So there is no substantial nature, as the deflationist claims.

There may be other ways to flesh out the deflationist idea, but the claims (T1) and (T2) provide one way of doing this, and allow us to see the force of the idea that deflationism threatens standard approaches to the difference between expressivism and realism. Before turning to the question of how the deflationist view sketched here threatens to force us into accepting one of the Extreme Solutions, I will outline an analogous deflationary view about reference.

4   Deflationism about reference

It may be possible to argue that deflationism about truth entails deflationism about two related semantic notions, namely reference (for proper names) and satisfaction (for predicates). We do not need to investigate these arguments, since it will be quite natural for someone who accepts deflationist theses about truth to accept analogous deflationary theses about reference and satisfaction.

I will focus only on reference here. An expressivist will want to say not only that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true; in addition the expressivist will think that there is a property of obligation, and that 'obligation' refers to obligation.

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[12]Compare Taylor (2019).
[13]This idea is found in Soames (1997: 3).

We can quickly sketch what a deflationary view about reference, which is modeled on the deflationist view of truth sketched above, as follows. For instances of a schematic variable x, the notion of the reference of the term 'x' will satisfy the following schema:

(R) 'x' refers to a iff $x = a$

A deflationary conception of reference, then, makes the following claims about (R):

(R1) All there is to the meaning of 'refers' is its role in making (R) analytic.

(R2) Knowing the nature of reference requires nothing more than knowing (R1).

(R2) accomplishes for reference what (T2) (allegedly) accomplishes for truth. If (T2) captures the idea that there is nothing to the metaphysical nature of truth beyond the semantic fact in (T1), then (R2) captures the idea that there is nothing to the metaphysical nature of reference than the semantic fact in (R1).

5   A (second) complication: minimalism and the Moderate Solution

In this section I will develop the following argument: if we accept the deflationist's (R1) and (R2), then the Moderate Solution to the problem of creeping minimalism fails. If we must reject this solution, then we are forced into one of the Extreme Solutions.

Here I will focus on deflationism about reference, because a there are straightforward non-deflationary accounts of reference that reject (R2) in the literature on creeping minimalism. Analogous points could be made about deflationary truth; I return to the connection between truth and reference in the conclusion.

Begin with (R2), which holds that knowing the nature of reference requires nothing more than knowing that the instances of (R) are analytic. As with (T2), the import of (R2) is that knowing the nature of the fact that 'ought' refers to obligation requires knowing nothing more than the fact that the meaning of 'refers' makes ' 'ought' refers to obligation' analytic. So, there is no substantial nature to reference, including the reference of 'ought'.

(R2) is incompatible with an account of why 'ought' refers to obligation, which appeals to substantial metaphysical claims about obligation. As a simple case, take one possible view of how normative properties play an explanatory role in determining reference-facts that instances of (R) capture. Elite properties, according to this view, are more eligible for reference than non-elite properties—they are "reference magnets".[14] A normative realist who holds that obligation is elite will accept that 'ought' refers to obligation, an instance of (R). What is distinctive in this case is that the realist will add that there is a substantive

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[14]Cf. Lewis (1983, 1984), Dorr and Hawthorne (2013), Dunaway and McPherson (2016), Dunaway (forthcoming).

explanation for the fact that 'ought' refers to obligation. On this view, there are plenty of nearby gerrymandered properties, such as being obligatory but not occurring exactly at 3 pm on a Thursday, and being either obligatory or a sibling of Cicero. It is determinate that 'ought' does not refer to any of these nearby gerrymanders. This is because the normative property of obligation is elite, while the other properties are not.

If there is no substantial nature to reference, as (R2) holds, then the preceding explanation cannot hold. According to (R2), knowing (R1) is all there is to knowing the nature of reference. (R1) does not mention eliteness, as its only subject-matter is the linguistic status of 'refers'. Thus we can know what reference is, according to (R2), without knowing that obligation is a reference magnet. The deflationary conception of reference, so understood, is incompatible with reference-magnetic explanations of reference.[15]

6   Options

What this argument shows is that a realist account of reference[16] is incompatible with a deflationary conception of reference. There are, however, reasons to doubt that this shows that we are forced into adopting one of the Extreme Solutions. That is, we can grant that there *is* a problem of creeping minimalism, while simultaneously holding that it can be solved. I will focus on two reasons why we do not need to accept this result. The first concerns the dialectical role of deflationary conceptions of truth and reference in generating the problem of creeping minimalism. The second concerns the possibility of non-metaphysical expressivist approaches to truth and reference that are also incompatible with deflationism.

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[15]This point is put in terms of a certain kind of explanatory solution to the problem of creeping minimalism, viz., one which appeals to reference-magnetism (Dunaway 2016). A similar point applies to other versions of an explanatory solution. Dreier (2004), for instance, holds that for realists, the moral property of wrongness will enter into the explanation of belief-ascriptions such as

  Sally believes that murder is wrong.

What it is for Sally to have this belief, according to Dreier's realist, is for her to stand in a certain relation to wrongness. An expressivist, by contrast, will deny this—all that is required is that Sally be in the right kind of planning-state. The deflationary view of reference consisting in (R), (R1), and (R2), appears to be incompatible with this claim: what it is for Sally's belief to refer to wrongness cannot, according to the deflationary view, involve the property of wrongness in a way that contrasts with the expressivist explanation.

  Likewise, Blackburn's explanatory solution, which appeals to representation, will run afoul of the deflationary view of reference, given that representation is defined in terms of reference to an extra-mental reality. Taylor (2019) develops more sophisticated versions of these arguments.

[16]Or, in the case of Dreier and Blackburn, belief-ascriptions and representation.

6.1 The dialectical status of deflationism

In stating the original problem of creeping minimalism, we granted that the expressivist can appeal to deflationist claims about truth and reference. There is a difference between granting that the expressivist can accept such a theory, and accepting that same theory ourselves. I will give an account of how we can do this in the next section. Here, I wish only to show that the Moderate Solution for the realist relies on granting, but not accepting, deflationary views of truth and reference.

The first step, for the realist, is to explain where the realist's concepts of truth and reference differ from the deflationist concepts. The deflationary conceptions provide legitimate understandings of truth and reference which are consistent with expressivism. However, given suitably defined non-deflationary notions of truth or reference; call them TRUTH and REFERENCE. We can then endeavor to show that only on the realist's view, but not the expressivist's is there normative TRUTH and normative terms REFER.

The deflationary notion of reference is characterized by (R1) and (R2). REFERENCE, on the other hand, is not characterized by (R2). In fact, the analogue of (R2) is false of REFERENCE:

(R2*) Knowing the nature of REFERENCE requires nothing more than knowing (R1).

(R2*) is false. Knowing that '*x*' REFERS to a requires knowing the true substantive theory of reference-determination—for instance, that a is the most elite of candidate referents that fit with the use of '*x*' fairly well.

A second point: if 'refers' picks out REFERENCE, then we should also distinguish between the thin notion of reference in (R) and an analogous notion that involves the substantive notion, (R*):

(R*) '*x*' REFERS to *a* iff $x = a$

An analogue of the thesis (R1) then reads:

(R1*) All there is to the meaning of 'REFERS' is its role in making (R*) analytic.

On the way I have characterized analyticity, (R1*) is not necessarily false. The realist can *accept* (R1*). If (R*) is analytic in virtue of the meaning of 'REFERS', this means that speakers are not treated as competent with 'REFERS' unless they accept (R*).[17] This does not mean that (R*) is guaranteed to be true by its meaning;

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[17]I am using the all-caps convention to pick out or use a word that refers to a relation of reference that has a substantial nature. The language which contains 'REFERS' does not treat it as a semantic convention that 'REFERS' as a substantial referent. Instead, the semantic conventions within the language are the same as for the deflationary notion, since (R1*) holds, just as (R1) does, and there are no further semantic conventions governing 'REFERS'. The all-caps convention indicates that the referent of the all-caps term is different from the lexicographically similar term that has a deflated referent.

it is open that speakers require as part of the competence-conditions for a term that others accept something that is false.

The competence-conditions for 'REFERS' do not guarantee that the instances of (R*) are true. It does not follow that the 'REFERS' is defective. If 'REFERS' refers to REFERENCE, then most instances of (R*) are true. However, it is not the analyticity of (R*) that makes the relevant facts about REFERENCE obtain. This is a consequence of the "epistemological" conception of analyticity, which I used to separate the linguistic from the metaphysical components of deflationism. It might turn out that the instances of (R*) are, in fact, true. That instances of (R*) are true does not obtain in virtue of the linguistic facts about 'REFERS': there is a substantial metaphysical relation that 'REFERS' picks out.

Suppose, for example, that 'REFERS' picks out the maximization of fit-with-use plus eliteness. Then, to know what REFERENCE is, one must know something about the eliteness of various properties. To be competent with 'REFERS' requires none of this: it requires only accepting the relevant instances of (R*). Competence needn't require a full grasp of the nature of what one is talking about.

This gives the realist resources to accept the Moderate Solution to the problem of creeping minimalism. The expressivist succeeds, when using deflationary concepts, in making claims about normative truth and reference. This doesn't mean that the expressivist's deflationary notions of truth and reference accurately characterize what they pick out. The realist can maintain that 'true' and 'refers' pick out TRUTH and REFERENCE. Crucially, this doesn't mean the expressivist, by endorsing deflationary conceptions, fails to make claims about TRUTH and REFERENCE.[18]

I return to this point in the next section. But before turning to this point, there is a second issue which suggests that expressivists themselves must grant that the deflationary concepts outlined above succeed in being candidate views of truth and reference, even if they fail to be the right ones.

6.2   *Expressivist explanations and deflationary reference*

The previous subsection raises the possibility that realists can think that deflationary conceptions of truth and reference give rise to the problem of creeping minimalism, without endorsing these deflationary conceptions themselves. Here I wish to add an additional motivation for thinking that such a route must be available. The reason is that (R2), if it is true, entails that may recent versions of expressivism are false. Realists are not the only ones who need to be able to grant the intelligibility of deflationary reference, without outright endorsing it.

If (R), (R1) and (R2) are true, then there can be no substantive account of what reference to normative properties is. The previous section developed this argument to rule out realist explanations of reference. (R2), however, says that

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[18]The point can be made from the expressivist's perspective as well. Even if truth and reference are deflationary, it is possible that the realist who thinks that they pick out TRUTH and REFERENCE manages to pick out the same thing as the expressivist.

there is nothing about the nature of reference to know, beyond what one knows in knowing (R1). This is incompatible with more than just realist explanations of reference. It also rules out a distinctive expressivist account of reference.

Gibbard (2013) is a paradigmatic expressivist, who accepts that there is a deflationary notion of truth, and endeavors to show how expressivists can deploy deflationary semantic notions to accept many of the same sentences realists accept. However, he explicitly endeavors to give an account of meaning and reference. It is not a realist account—the distinctive claim is that meaning and reference normative notions, which he explains in expressivist terms—but the account is a substantive one nonetheless.

Gibbard begins an account of how to understand the expressivist's use-conditional theory of meaning, which is given by (O):

(O) The meaning of 'ought' is to express a plan.

(O) is a claim about the meaning of 'ought'. Claims about meaning are, according to the theory in Gibbard (2013), claims about *how one ought to use the words in one's language*. Thus, (O) is a claim about how one ought to use the word 'ought'. This is the sense, for Gibbard, in which the meaning of 'meaning' is normative.[19]

Gibbard thus accepts (M):

(M) (O) is equivalent to the claim that one ought to use 'ought' to express a plan.

The expressivst's use-conditional theory meaning for normative language thus applies to claims about meaning. What sentences containing 'meaning' mean, including (M), involve expressions of plan. This, in a nutshell, is Gibbard's theory of meaning.

Since meaning is normative on this theory, *reference* is normative as well. Take following instance of (R):

(R$_O$) 'Ought' refers to obligation.

(R$_O$) is equivalent, on the Gibbardian view, to a normative claim about how to use the word 'ought':

(R3) (R$_O$) is analytically equivalent to the claim that one ought to apply 'ought' only to acts that are obligatory.

(R3) captures the normative nature of claims about reference, on Gibbard's view, but it doesn't capture the type of normative claim most speakers will make when then make a claim about the reference of 'ought'. Speakers will have to have some opinion about what obligation is. Normative concepts guide action; 'do what is obligatory' is not by itself action-guiding.

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[19]Strictly speaking this is restricted to a normative claim about someone who is a part of an English-speaking linguistic community, and who wishes to communicate with that community. For simplicity, I will not make these qualifications explicit in the main discussion.

Suppose, for simplicity, that what is obligatory is to maximize happiness. Expressivists and realists alike can accept this claim. (R_O) is equivalent to (R_H):

(R_H) 'Ought' refers to happiness-maximization

While (R_O) is equivalent to (R_H), but they are not *analytically* equivalent. Even if it is true that happiness-maximizing acts are obligatory, it is not a requirement on competence with 'ought' that one accept this. Still, if (R_H) is true, a thesis that we can call the *Substantive Normativity of Reference* thesis follows. The Substantive Normativity of Reference thesis says the following:

(R_O) is equivalent to the claim that one ought to apply 'ought' only to acts that maximize happiness.

The Substantive Normativity of Reference thesis is incompatible with the strong deflationary conception of reference. There are two reasons for this.

First, someone could reject the Substantive Normativity of Reference thesis without failing to understand what reference is. Thus (R2), which is a part of a deflationary conception of reference, is false. If (R2) were true, then knowing that the meaning of 'refers' makes the sentence ' 'ought' refers to obligation true' would be sufficient to know all there is to know about reference. But the Substantive Normativity of Reference, if true, captures something about the nature of reference. The thesis can be known only if one knows a claim that cannot be known simply by knowing the meaning of 'refers': that obligation is happiness-maximization.

There is a second reason why the Substantive Normativity of Reference thesis is incompatible with a deflationary view of reference. The Substantive Normativity of Reference thesis holds that reference is a normative notion; i.e., that 'refers' belongs to the class of terms that analytically imply directives on action. This is a non-trivial claim about reference, which amounts to the claim that reference does have a nature. In particular, its nature is normative. This is not something which one automatically knows by knowing the meaning of 'refers'.

The lesson to draw from this is that, while expressivists can adopt a minimalist conception of truth and reference to mimic the realist's claims, expressivists can also follow Gibbard in giving more robust characterization of notions. This should not mean that expressivists are forced into the analogues of Extreme Solutions faced by the realist. They do not need either to claim that the deflationist who accepts (R2) fails to make claims about reference or otherwise give up on the claim that reference is normative. In fact, Gibbard himself (in Gibbard (2003)) developed in detail many of the resources expressivists need to generate the problem of creeping minimalism. But developing in later work the idea that meaning and reference are normative, it does not appear that Gibbard must reject his earlier claims about the explanatory solution.

To summarize: although the details are different, Gibbard rejects, along with the realist, a deflationary view about reference which includes (R1) and (R2). But

he still can think that an expressivist who *did* accept these theses would present a genuine problem for those who wish to hold that there is a substantial difference between realism and expressivism. We need to return to a deflationary view of truth and reference and articulate how it can generate the original problem of creeping minimalism, without forcing both realists and Gibbardian expressivists into an Extreme Solution.

7   A positive proposal: analyticity with metaphysics

In order to introduce a positive solution, begin by distinguishing between two types of theories of what a term means. One the one hand, there are *subject-preserving* theories, which manage to be about the same subject matter, even if they differ over substantive claims about the relevant subject. These are to be contrasted with *subject-changing* theories, which as theories of what a particular linguistic expression means, entail that the expression does not refer to what we ordinarily take it to refer to.

Applied to theories of what 'true' means, this distinction amounts to the distinction between theories of what 'true' means which entail that 'true' refers to truth, and theories of what 'true' means that which entail that 'true' does not refer to truth. As a very simple example, take someone who holds that 'true' applies to a sentence just in case the sentence is written using an odd number of vowels: they do not manage to hold a theory of *truth*. Someone who holds this theory simply uses the word 'true' with a different meaning.[20] This is a *subject-changing* theory of what 'true' means.

On the other hand, a theory doesn't need to be the correct theory of truth, in order to succeed in being a theory of truth. Someone who accepts an inflationary theory of truth[21] is not the same as someone who counts vowels in order to decide whether 'true' applies to a particular sentence. The inflationary theorist succeeds in putting forward a theory of truth, even if it is false. It is a subject-preserving theory of what 'true' means.

Return to deflationary theories. Simply because expressivists can accept the sentence ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true', and can do so by accepting the deflationary theses (R)-(R2), we cannot claim, purely on the basis of the fact that the expressivist accepts this sentence, that the expressivist thinks that there are normative truths. We need to establish, in addition, that the deflationary theory is not a subject-changing theory. If it were a subject-changing theory, then we could grant that, given what the expressivist means by 'true', the expressivist view can accept the sentence ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true', but is not thereby

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[20]As puzzles about radical interpretation show (Putnam (1981), Quine (1960)), we can take any number of crazy interpretations of a term and, with sufficient re-interpretation of the rest of our language, make those crazy interpretations come out as true. This given any interpretation of 'true', it would be possible accept ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true', given appropriate interpretations of other terms. See also Schroeder (2005).

[21]E.g., Alston (1996)

consistent with the claim that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true. This would not generate the problem of creeping minimalism.

The deflationist's theory of truth needs to be a subject-preserving theory. However, we do not need to *agree* with all components of the deflationist theory, in order to hold that it is subject-preserving. Some false theories of truth are still theories of *truth*, rather than something else. This is the path to avoiding the Extreme Solutions, for both the realist and the Gibbardian expressivist.[22] We need to identify the grounds for holding that the deflationary conceptions of truth and reference are false, but are still subject-preserving theories. The realist does not need to accept the expressivist's deflationary theories, in order to concede that the expressivist thinks that there are normative truths, and that normative terms refer.

I will not present a general theory of what makes a theory of truth or reference subject-preserving. Rather, I will close by sketching one particular set of claims that meets the conditions set out.

What makes the expressivist's deflationary theory a subject-preserving theory reference? Even a non-deflationist who thinks that reference has a substantial nature can agree with instances of (R). Moreover, if the facts about analyticity are simply facts about the competence-conditions for 'true' in English, the non-deflationist can also concede that the instances of (R) are analytic, as (R1) says. This is a consequence of the "epistemological" conception of analyticity I introduced in §3. (R1) is not a metaphysical claim about what makes the instances of (R) true. Instead, it is simply the claim that speakers treat a disposition to primitively accept the instances of (R) as a condition on competence with 'refers'. Agreement over (R) is a significant amount of agreement, between both the deflationist and the realist, over the meaning of 'refers'.

Plausibly, the realist can agree with this, and should treat this as securing a shared subject-matter for the deflationist. They agree not only over which sentences are true, but in addition over which speakers are treated as competent with 'refers'. But it does not mean that they agree on every aspect of a theory of truth—in particular, the realist can think that the deflationist conception of truth is subject-preserving without being true.

The deflationist will also accept (R2), which implies that there is no substantial nature to reference. A realist will deny (R2). One way of doing so, sketched above, is to hold that reference is determined in part by the existence of reference magnets.This view holds that knowing (R1) is not sufficient to know what reference is, and so (R2) is false. This doesn't mean that the realist should view the deflationist view as not subject-preserving. It is merely a different (and, by the realist's lights, false) view about the nature of reference.

It is worth being clear about what this realist view is saying. It says that the facts about which objects and properties are metaphysically elite—the reference magnets—plus facts about how speakers use their words together determine what

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[22]I will focus on how the realist should respond here; in the conclusion I sketch the analogous Gibbardian approach.

items in a language refer to. There are objective, mind-independent facts about eliteness, and so reference, on this view, receives a measure of the same objectivity. On this view, what we respond to when we make judgments about the reference of a term in our language is not, on a natural reading, these objective facts about reference magnets and fit with usage. Instead, we simply make judgments about reference on the grounds that we are primitively disposed to accept them, on pain of not being counted as competent users of 'refers'. In other words, there are substantial metaphysical facts about the nature of reference, but we have true beliefs (if we are lucky) about these facts simply by deferring to the competence-conditions for 'refers' in our language.

How does this preserve the possibility of a Moderate Solution, and avoids either of the Extreme solutions? Recall what the Extreme Solutions say:

Extreme Solution #1: Truth is not minimal; consequently expressivsts fail to show that they can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is a true sentence, since they rely on a minimalist theory of truth when doing so.

Extreme Solution #2: Since truth is minimal, expressivists can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is a true sentence. This precludes non-minimal accounts of the meaning of 'one ought to give to the poor', which give an explanatory role to normative truth. There is not a difference, even at the level of explanatory priority, between realism and expressivism.

Begin with Extreme Solution #2. If the expressivist[23] has a subject-preserving account of 'true', then the expressivist can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true. (If, on the other hand, the deflationary account were not subject-preserving, then the expressivist would be able to accept the sentence ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true', but would not thereby accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true.) However, this does not entail that truth *is* minimal. It only entails that the expressivist *thinks* that truth is minimal, and does not thereby adopt a subject-changing view of truth. The consequence of Extreme Solution #2— that the deflationary account "precludes non-minimal accounts of the meaning of 'one ought to give to the poor', which give an explanatory role to normative truth" does not hold. Realists can still give non-minimal accounts of these notion, since they do not accept the deflationary account.

We are not thereby forced to adopt Extreme Solution #1. The realist thinks that truth and reference are not minimal, since there is a substantial nature to reference. It does not follow that "expressivsts fail to show that they can accept that 'one ought to give to the poor' is a true sentence". The expressivist does think that 'one ought to give to the poor' is true, since the expressivist has a subject-preserving deflationary view of truth. Just because we (perhaps rightly) think that

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[23]The expressivist here is one who accepts the deflationary notions of truth and reference, not the Gibbardian expressivist from §6.

the expressivist has an inadequate conception of truth, it does not follow that the expressivist has a subject-changing view of truth.

This shows that we are not forced to accept one of the Extreme Solutions. Thus the Moderate Solution is coherent. The Moderate Solution says the following:

The Moderate Solution Realists and expressivists do not differ over whether normative sentences are true. Instead, they differ over claims about explanatory priority. For the realist, the truth-conditions for normative sentences explain what these sentences mean. Expressivists reject these explanations.

Realists can accept the Moderate Solution, on the following grounds. Realists and expressivists do not differ over whether normative sentences are true because (i) they both accept (T), and so will accept sentences such as ' 'one ought to give to the poor' is true', and (ii) they both accept (T1), and so the realist can regard the expressivist as having a subject-preserving view of 'true'. The instances of (T) that the expressivist accepts involve accepting claims about truth, rather than something else.

Since the realist and expressivist agree on whether normative sentences are true, without agreeing on a full theory of truth, there is room to disagree over what explains the truth, as the Moderate Solution holds. Realists can hold that 'refers' picks out REFERENCE as it is determined, in part, by the presence of reference magnets. Similarly 'true' picks out TRUTH. A deflationist about reference denies this by endorsing (T2) and (R2), which entail that what 'refers' and 'true' apply to can be explained in any substantive way whatsoever. By agreeing with the deflationist about the roles 'true' and 'refers' play in out language, we share enough in common with the deflationist to be able to agree that the there is a real problem of creeping minimalism. This does not entail that we agree with the deflationist position, and so can consistently hold that the expressivist fails to capture the substantial nature of truth and reference. This is the Moderate Solution.

8 Conclusion

The key to avoiding the Extreme Solutions, for the realist, is to agree with the deflationist's claims about analyticity— (T1) and (R1)—but to reject the deflationist's further claims about the substantial nature of truth and analyticity, namely (T2) and (R2). The first part guarentees that there is a shared subject-matter, and so we are not forced to hold that deflationists hold subject-changing theories of truth and reference. The second part guarantees that we are free to hold that there are substantial explanations of facts about truth and reference, as the explanatory solution requires. There are a few additional details that we can add to this picture in closing.

First, a Gibbardian expressivist will be able to accommodate deflationary views in a similar way. Recall that the Gibbardian holds that reference is

normative, and thereby holds a view about reference that is incompatible with the deflationist's (R2). The Gibbardian doesn't hold a metaphysically substantial view of reference, but it isn't the deflationist's notion of reference either. However, it would be harsh for someone who holds that reference is normative to deny that the deflationist fails to make claims about reference at all. Instead, the pattern of explanation should fit what the realist says: the deflationist has a subject-preserving account of reference, because the deflationist view includes (R) and (R1). Granting that the deflationist has a subject-preserving view of reference, however, does not entail that the deflationist view is true. This is possible because, like the realist, the Gibbardian accepts the deflationist's (R) and (R1), while rejecting (R2).

A second issue is the connection between truth and reference. Deflationists can adopt analogous sets of deflationary theses about both notions. I have focused, however, only on alternative, non-deflationary accounts of *reference*, and not truth. What would a non-deflationary account of truth look like for the realist? Here we don't need to adopt a substantive account of the nature of truth, in order to distinguish the realist's notion from deflationary truth. Instead, we need only a thesis about the relationship between truth and reference: that certain claims about reference analytically entail claims about truth.

In the case of simple subject-predicate sentences, the relevant entailments are instances of the following:

if 'x' refers to a and a satisfies 'F', then $\ulcorner Fa \urcorner$ is true.

Suppose, as the realist holds, 'refers' picks out REFERENCE: that is, it picks out a relation that maximizes the eliteness of candidate referents plus fit with use. It is then very natural to hold that what 'true' picks out is not the deflationary notion of truth, but is rather TRUTH, which is non-trivially related to REFERENCE (and SATISFACTION). One option is that TRUTH as it applies to subject-predicate sentences is determined by the REFERENCE- and SATISFACTION- relations: $\ulcorner Fa \urcorner$ is TRUE just in case, and because,'x' REFERS to a and a SATISFIES 'F'. If there are substantial metaphysical facts—perhaps facts involving reference magnets—which determine what REFERS to a, and what a SATISFIES, then there is also, on this account, a substantial nature to TRUTH. This is a realist-friendly account of a substantial notion of truth, but it does not give an analysis of what *constitutes* truth in robust terms. Instead, the account agrees with the deflationist that truth is analytically connected to reference and satisfaction, but give substantial accounts of the latter notions.

A final point is that the realist picture we are left with leaves some epistemological questions unanswered. If the realist accepts (R) and (R1), then there is a natural way in which one comes to form beliefs about reference-facts, including the fact that the normative term 'ought' refers to obligation. This method involves simply relying on what must accept, in order to count as competent with 'ought' in one's linguistic community. One must accept that 'ought' refers to obligation,

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in order to count as competent with 'ought' by other English-speakers. Many speakers might thereby come to believe, without further investigation, that 'ought' refers to obligation.

If the realist view about the reference of 'ought' is right, 'ought' refers to obligation in virtue of the non-trivial metaphysical facts about obligation that it is a reference magnet. They have beliefs about REFERENCE. Even if one accepts the right claims about REFERENCE in order to count as competent with 'refers' in one's community, how could one *know* these facts? One's method for coming to believe them (by relying on the competence-conditions imposed by one's linguistic community) does not involve investigating the facts about what constitutes REFERENCE. It appears that one's beliefs about REFERENCE would be true by no more than an accident of luck.

There is a large body of anti-realist literature which aims to develop epistemological objections to realism along similar lines. These objections fit a general pattern: the metaphysical grounds for the realist's claims about normativity appear to bear very little relation to the methods we employ to form normative beliefs. One prominent example includes the literature on "debunking" arguments.[24] Here, the epistemological objection to realism is similar: the realist's metaphysics holds that there are real, substantial normative facts, but the epistemology of normative facts does not involve investigating these grounds. Instead, our beliefs are infused with survival-enhancing dispositions that are the product of natural selection.

It is a large question whether, in general, these epistemological arguments can succeed in identifying a defect in realism.[25] I will not try to show that the realist is free of epistemological difficulties here. Rather, will simply note that a realist who weds the deflationist claims (T1) and (R1) about the language of truth and reference to robust metaphyisical claims about their nature faces no new problem here. This position, I have argued, allows us to provide a satisfactory account of the pull of the problem of creeping minimalism without conceding that it is irresolvable. Perhaps it leaves the realist susceptible to a general type of epistemological worry that plagues realism. These are worries for realism in general, and not for the realist's prospects for solving the problem of creeping minimalism.

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[24]See, for example, Street (2006), Schafer (2010), Kahane (2011) for the outline of these arguments; Vavova (2014) provides some grounds for skepticism that arguments of this type will succeed.
[25]And, moreover, whether adding a dose of anti-realism will help: see Berker (2014), Schafer (2017), and Dunaway (2018)

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