

# RELIABILISM AND DEFLATIONISM

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In this article I examine several issues concerning reliabilism and deflationism. I critique Alvin Goldman's account of the key differences between correspondence and deflationary theories and his claim that reliabilism can be combined only with those truth theories that maintain a commitment to truthmakers. I then consider how reliability could be analysed from a deflationary perspective and show that deflationism is compatible with reliabilism. I close with a discussion of whether a deflationary theory of knowledge is possible.

Reliabilists claim that beliefs are justified just when they are produced by cognitive processes that are reliable. Reliable belief-forming processes are those that yield sufficiently high ratios of true to false beliefs. We can ask whether the technical notion of reliability at the heart of reliabilism presupposes any particular conception of truth, and more generally, whether the theories of knowledge and justification we offer constrain or are constrained by the theories of truth we offer.

In this article I explore a set of issues concerning reliabilism about justification and deflationism about truth.<sup>1</sup> First, I examine the correspondence theory recently defended by Alvin Goldman, including his account of the key differences between correspondence and deflationary theories and his claim that truth theories compatible with reliabilism must be committed to real-world truthmakers. I then address the issue of what a deflationary analysis of reliability might look like and how it might be affected by the deflationist claim that appeals to truth or correspondence perform no explanatory work. I conclude with a brief consideration of the prospects for a deflationary epistemology.

## I

Alvin Goldman, the leading expositor of reliabilism, has occasionally felt the need to defend a correspondence theory of truth in the course of defending reliabilism. Goldman claims that reliabilists cannot be completely neutral with respect to truth theories but must be committed to the correspondence theory of truth or to something very close to it.<sup>2</sup> While

<sup>1</sup>The considerations advanced in this article also apply to theories that include reliability as merely one component of warrant or justification [e.g., Alston 1988; Plantinga 1993].

<sup>2</sup>At one point Goldman [1986] claimed that reliabilism must be wedded to a correspondence theory, though he has since weakened that claim.

Goldman argues that deflationary, antirealist, and epistemic theories of truth are all false, he concedes that deflationary theories—unlike antirealist and epistemic theories—are compatible with reliabilism.<sup>3</sup>

Goldman [1999: 59] characterizes his own recent version of the correspondence theory as follows:

- (DS) An item *X* (a proposition, a sentence, a belief, etc.) is true if and only if *X* is descriptively successful, that is, *X* purports to describe reality and its content fits reality.

Goldman [1999: 61] claims that his theory

features a relation between the descriptive item and (some segment of) reality. Thus, the basic intuition of the correspondence approach, that (descriptive) truth involves a relation to reality, is correct.

It is important to distinguish between: (a) truth bearers, (b) the relation of fitting, and (c) what it is that truth bearers fit when they are true. Somewhat surprisingly, Goldman never explains what the relation of ‘fitting reality’ consists in. Perhaps in lieu of such an explanation, Goldman spends most of his time emphasizing the important role that ‘reality-based truth makers’ (i.e., what it is that truth bearers fit when they are true) play in determining truth values. For example, he writes,

My invocation of reality brings into focus an important feature of the correspondence theory that distinguishes it from its competitors. This is the claim that truth requires ‘*truth makers*’: worldly entities of some sort that *make* propositions or other truth bearers true.

[Goldman 1999: 61]

What kind of truthmakers does Goldman think is required by his correspondence theory? He answers,

In my view, the correspondence theory need not be saddled with sentence-like facts, or facts at all for that matter. Indeed, it is not entirely clear that the correspondence theory requires a unique category of objects to serve as truth makers. Perhaps some propositions are made true by concrete events, whereas other propositions are made true by relations among abstract entities. As long as anything that makes a proposition true is part of reality—construed as broadly as possible—this fits the correspondence theory as formulated by (DS).

[Goldman 1999: 61–2]

<sup>3</sup>By ‘antirealism about truth’ I mean the view that it is not possible for there to be true propositions that transcend the best investigative efforts of human beings to discover or verify them. I use the term ‘epistemic theory of truth’ to denote any theory that identifies truth with some kind of positive epistemic status of the truth bearer. For a discussion of the relation between reliabilism and antirealist and epistemic theories of truth, cf. Beebe [forthcoming].

Goldman's use of the term 'truth maker' is somewhat at odds with common usage. The term is more often taken to refer to (perhaps sentence-like) facts—the very things Goldman does not want to identify with truthmakers. It is clear from Goldman's explanation above that he wants to use the term in a rather ontologically neutral way. He merely wants to insist that descriptive items are made true by how things stand in reality. Goldman [1999: 61] tells us that 'the success of a content in "fitting" reality depends not just on the content but on the portion of reality that it purports to describe'. This requirement is meant to exclude the suggestion that truth is a matter internal to a set of propositions or beliefs (e.g., coherence). Descriptive items, he claims, are true only when (presumably mind-independent) reality is at those descriptive items describe it to be.

However, if what Goldman means by a commitment to truthmakers is this rather innocuous view, his claim that the 'invocation of reality brings into focus an important feature of the correspondence theory that distinguishes it from its competitors' is simply false. Very few deflationists would deny that the truth of a descriptive item depends upon how things stand in the world. (To my knowledge, Robert Brandom [1994] is the only prominent deflationist who does not allow mind-independent reality to play a significant role in determining truth values.) Consider the equivalence schemata employed in W. V. Quine's [1970] disquotationalism:

(D) ' $p$ ' is true iff  $p$

and Paul Horwich's [1998] minimalism:

(MT) The proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ .

According to deflationists, the most fundamental thing we can say about the truth of some sentence ' $p$ ' or proposition  $p$  is simply that it will be true just when  $p$ . As William Alston [1996: 5] put it, 'Nothing more is required for the truth of a statement, and nothing less will suffice'. Consequently, the correspondence theory's claim that truth depends upon how things stand in reality—*pace* Goldman—does not distinguish it from its deflationary competitors. Deflationary theorists also maintain that reality being as it is described to be is a necessary condition for the truth of descriptive items.

Goldman's exclusive focus on reality-based truthmakers and his almost complete neglect of the fitting relation make one wonder whether Goldman's stance toward truth might not be more deflationary than he realizes. According to Horwich [1998: 20], the distinguishing feature of deflationism is the denial that any analysis of truth of the form

(1)  $(\forall x) (x \text{ is true iff } x \text{ is } F)$

can be given, where ' $x$  is  $F$ ' (or any  $n$ -ary relation  $R$  the domain of which is the set of all things  $x$  such that, for some  $y_1, \dots$ , and some  $y_n \langle x, y_1, \dots, y_n \rangle \in R$ ) expresses a property that is conceptually or explanatorily more

fundamental than ‘ $x$  if true’.<sup>4</sup> If, as (DS) seems to suggest, Goldman intends to provide an analysis of truth, it is exceedingly odd that he does not explicate the fitting relation, since this is the notion that shoulders most of the explanatory burden in his analysis. Precisely because Goldman has practically nothing to say about the relation of fitting reality, one wonders whether he really intends to provide an analysis of truth at all. This suspicion is only strengthened when Goldman [1999: 60] claims that (DS) ‘is in the general vicinity of William Alston’s [1996: 22] “minimal realist” theory of truth’. According to Alston’s [1996: 5] minimal realism:

(MR) A statement (proposition, belief...) is true if and only if what the statement says to be the case actually is the case.

Alston does not provide any explicit definition or analysis of truth and seems to count as a deflationist in Horwich’s sense.<sup>5</sup> If the comparison to Alston’s minimal realism is intended to suggest that (DS) should be understood in a deflationary fashion, then perhaps there is nothing more to Goldman’s notion of ‘descriptive success’ than reality being as it is described to be.

However, in spite of Goldman’s comparison to Alston and the fact that he does not carry to completion the project of analysing truth, the suspicion that Goldman’s truth theory might be deflationary cannot be sustained. Goldman is highly critical of deflationism, and too many of his remarks suggest that he views (DS) as providing an analysis of truth—the very possibility of which deflationists deny. As we shall see, Goldman’s (DS) is similar to Alston’s in the same way that practically all deflationary theories are similar to Alston’s: they take the realist view that truth is determined by how things stand in the world.

Goldman claims that his correspondence theory is superior to its deflationary rivals because his theory—unlike those of the deflationists—acknowledges reality’s important truth-determining role. He writes,

[T]he commitment to truth makers [is] an element that deflationism and other rival theories either reject or ignore... Deflationism is deliberately silent about reality-based truth makers. It is precisely intended to give the meaning of ‘true’ *without* invoking any sort of relation to a truth maker. This conflicts with the meaning that (DS) attaches to ‘true’.

[Goldman 1999: 63–4]

Goldman [1999: 66] takes deflationism’s silence about reality to be an indication that they reject the claim that ‘each truth is made true by the existence of a corresponding fact’. Any truth theory that prevents reality

<sup>4</sup>Deflationists do not deny the truth of statements such as “‘ $a$  is  $F$ ’ is true iff there exists an object  $x$  such that “ $a$ ” refers to  $x$  and “ $F$ ” is satisfied by  $x$ ’. They simply deny that any such statement can constitute an analysis of truth. Cf. Horwich [1998: 10].

<sup>5</sup>Alston [1996: 41ff.], of course, denies that he is a deflationist and is highly critical of deflationism, but that is because he follows Kirkham [1992: §10.7] in identifying deflationism with the denial that there is a property of truth. The trouble with Kirkham’s account of deflationism is that, according to it, Paul Horwich—the leading deflationary theorist—does not count as a deflationist.

from playing a central role in determining truth values is clearly unacceptable. However, Goldman's inference from:

- (2) Deflationary theories of truth are deliberately silent about reality-based truth makers in their accounts of truth

to:

- (3) Deflationary theories deny that reality plays any significant role in determining truth values

is not valid. The reason deflationists are seemingly silent about the relation between truth bearers and reality is that they do not think that any explication of the relation between truth bearers and reality could ever be plugged into the right-hand side of ' $p$  is true iff. . . ' to yield an analysis of truth. Consequently, they simply fill in the right-hand side with ' $p$ '. But that does not mean deflationary theorists deny that the truth values of truth bearers are determined by how things stand in reality. Goldman fails to distinguish between:

- (a) the denial that there are facts, understood as ready-made, sentence-shaped pieces of nonlinguistic reality to which true sentences correspond;
- (b) the denial that it is necessary for an adequate theory of truth to include within it an explanation of the nature and structure of facts; and
- (c) the denial that 'snow is white' is made true by snow's being white.

Some deflationists subscribe to (a) because—like many philosophers—they are reluctant to add facts to their ontologies. All deflationists subscribe to (b), but none subscribe to (c). Goldman misunderstands deflationism's commitment to (b) to involve a commitment to (c).

A few pages after claiming that 'the commitment to truth makers [is] an element that deflationism and other rival theories either reject or ignore', Goldman cites the following passages from Quine and Horwich in which the two deflationary theorists invoke the truth-determining role of reality:

No sentence is true but reality makes it so . . . [T]he truth predicate serves . . . to point through the sentence to reality; it serves as a reminder that though sentences are mentioned, reality is still the whole point.

[Quine 1970: 10–11; cited in Goldman 1999: 67]

'Snow is white' is *made true* by the fact that snow is white.

[Horwich 1990: 112; cited in Goldman 1999: 67]

These quotations do not cause Goldman to doubt his previous claim that appealing to reality as the primary determinant of truth values distinguishes the correspondence theory from its deflationary competitors. Instead, he

takes them to be evidence that a partial ‘*rapprochement*’ between correspondence and deflationism might be possible. Another interpretation is that Goldman fails to understand the key features that distinguish deflationary and correspondence theories.

At the end of the day, the most disappointing aspect of Goldman’s [1999] discussion of truth is that he never explains what the relation of ‘fitting reality’ amounts to, even though this is the most important notion in his theory of truth. Sometimes a thinker will take a certain notion to be an explanatory primitive and then provide a set of axioms or principles in which the primitive term figures that jointly provide an implicit definition of that term. Goldman, however, does not even do that. Typically, the primary motivation for pursuing a correspondence rather than a deflationary theory of truth has been the conviction that an adequate truth theory should spell out the relation that obtains between truth bearers and reality. Deflationism’s unwillingness to do this has been taken by correspondence theorists to be its greatest weakness. Because Goldman never explains descriptive success or fitting reality, what he proposes is a correspondence theory that fails to tell us anything about what correspondence to reality is. Such a correspondence theory cannot claim to satisfy those who share the traditional motivation for pursuing the correspondence theory.<sup>6</sup>

## II

Goldman [1999: 68] ultimately makes the following concession regarding the compatibility of reliabilism and deflationism:

To summarize, I believe that the various rivals of the correspondence theory are subject to crippling objections,<sup>7</sup> so that the correspondence theory, while

<sup>6</sup>It is interesting to ask what difference there might be between a deflationist who claims that no analysis of truth can be given and a correspondence theorist who analyses truth in terms of correspondence but takes correspondence to be an unexplained primitive. Typically, correspondence theorists seek to provide an explanation of what correspondence consists in. Kirkham [1992: 119] calls the two most common ways of developing the idea of correspondence ‘correspondence as correlation’ and ‘correspondence as congruence’. He writes,

The first of these, put very simply, says that every truth bearer is correlated to a state of affairs. If the state of affairs to which a given truth bearer is correlated actually obtains, then the truth bearer is true; otherwise it is false. What the correspondence-as-correlation theory does *not* claim is that the truth bearer mirrors, pictures, or is in any sense structurally isomorphic with the state of affairs to which it is correlated. A truth bearer *as a whole* is correlated to a state of affairs *as a whole*. On the other hand, correspondence as congruence *does* claim that there is a structural isomorphism between truth bearers and the facts to which they correspond when the truth bearer is true.

A correspondence theorist who takes correspondence to be primitive takes the analysis of truth one step further than the deflationist but then stops. A correspondence-as-congruence theorist takes things even further. But simply providing a longer chain of analyses than one’s competitors does not necessarily mean that one has provided a better explanation, and it can be extremely difficult to know when one theory provides a better explanation than another. Until we have an account of what explanatory constraints a set of necessary and sufficient conditions must satisfy in order to count as a proper analysis, the claim that Horwich takes to be the *sine qua non* of deflationism—viz., that no analysis of truth can be given—remains obscure. (Thanks to an anonymous referee from *AJP* for calling my attention to this issue.)

<sup>7</sup>With breathtaking speed, Goldman [1999: 54–9] catalogues objections to the primary deflationary theories—including Strawson’s performative theory, Quine’s [1970] disquotationalism, Grover’s [1992] prosentential theory, and Horwich’s [1998] minimalism—in a mere five pages. He concludes that his overly brief sketch of objections amounts to a ‘crippling’ case against deflationism.

requiring further metaphysical clarification, is still the best bet. But even if some form of positive deflationism can surmount its obstacles and be rendered fully attractive, this would not force us to relinquish the basic correspondence idea that what *makes* sentences or propositions true are real-world truth makers. The tenability of this basic idea is all that is required for the veritistic epistemology I shall develop in the remainder of this book. Actually, it might be argued that the epistemological project of the book is compatible even with full-fledged deflationism. The only requirement is that epistemic, pragmatic, and relativist theories of truth be excluded.

As we have seen, most deflationary theorists are committed to the existence of truthmakers in Goldman's rather innocuous sense of that term. Since (as Goldman even admits in his proposal for *rapprochement*) deflationary theories typically entail that beliefs and propositions are made true by how things stand in reality, they pass Goldman's test for compatibility with reliabilism.<sup>8</sup>

While the deflationary stance toward truth makers does not appear to render deflationism incompatible with reliabilism, there is another issue that might do so. Deflationists claim that truth never performs any real explanatory work. However, because reliabilists explain epistemic justification in terms of the truth-conduciveness of cognitive processes, truth certainly seems to be playing an important explanatory role in the reliabilist project. *Prima facie*, then, there seems to be a conflict between the claims of reliabilism and deflationism. In this section I explain how reliabilists who would be deflationists can overcome this apparent obstacle.

Before tackling the explanatory role of truth in reliabilism, it will be helpful to look at the simpler case of invoking truth to explain the success of human actions. Suppose that Smith successfully performs the action of attending a concert on Friday and that his action is based in part upon his belief that the concert is on Friday. If Smith succeeds in arriving at the concert on Friday, what best explains the success of his action? The anti-deflationist will answer that there is an important property of Smith's belief (or perhaps a property of the proposition expressed by his belief)—*viz.*, truth—that at least partially explains his success. His action succeeds because his belief is *true*. According to the anti-deflationist, truth is central

<sup>8</sup>Goldman's emphasis on real-world truth makers may also reflect a commitment on his part to the mind-independence of reality and to the recognition-transcendence of truth. Epistemic truth theories that identify truth with some kind of (perhaps idealized) epistemic status deny the recognition-transcendence of truth. That is, they claim that, although some truths may resist our current attempts to discover them, there cannot be truths so far beyond our ken that they could not be discovered somewhere by someone. While it is doubtful that reliabilism actually requires this strong form of recognition-transcendence, most deflationary theories can allow for it. A deflationist who maintains that nothing more is required for the truth of *p* than *p* could allow that *p* could be true even if no one knows or even could know that *p*. Deflationary theories typically deny that truth bearers will be true only if we could discover them to be true, or only if we would be warranted in asserting them in ideal epistemic conditions, or only if they would be agreed upon in the ideal limit of inquiry. Thus, deflationists can allow that there might be beliefs or statements whose truth cannot be determined by even our best methods of inquiry. If Goldman thinks reliabilism is only compatible with truth theories that affirm (or at least are compatible with) the strong recognition-transcendence of truth, this may partially explain why he takes a more conciliatory stance toward deflationary theories than toward epistemic theories. Cf. Beebe [forthcoming] for an extended discussion of the nature of the recognition-transcendence of reliabilist justification, the recognition-transcendence of truth, and the relation between the two notions.

to any adequate explanation of Smith's successful action. Deflationists disagree. They reply that:

- (4) Smith succeeded in performing an action based upon the belief that the concert was on Friday because his belief was true

is both logically and explanatorily equivalent to:

- (5) Smith succeeded in performing an action based upon the belief that the concert was on Friday because the concert was on Friday.

Deflationists claim that the reference to truth in (4) is eliminable without explanatory loss. Why do actions based upon the belief that cayenne pepper is spicy generally succeed (other things being equal)? Because, deflationists would say, cayenne pepper is spicy. Why do actions based upon the belief that the acceleration imparted by the Earth's gravitational field to a freely falling body is  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  generally succeed (other things being equal)? Because the acceleration imparted by the Earth's gravitational field to a freely falling body is  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . And so on. Deflationists claim there is no need to implicate a special truth property in any of these explanations. The explanatory burden in each case is born by facts about concert times, peppers, and gravity—but not by truth.

Deflationists can employ this same general strategy to explain reliability without relying upon truth to do any of the explanatory work. According to Horwich [1998: 47], the reliability of a certain method of inquiry can be represented—in good deflationary fashion—as follows:

- (6) 'O' would be affirmed in  $C('O')$  iff%  $O^*$ .

In this formulation 'O' stands for any observation sentence, ' $O^*$ ' for the proposition expressed by 'O', ' $C('O')$ ' for circumstances conducive the accurate determination of the truth value of observation sentences, and ' $p$  iff%  $q$ ' for the claim that the probability of  $q$  given  $p$  and of  $p$  given  $q$  are both very high. Notice that (6) does not read:

- (7) 'O' would be affirmed in  $C('O')$  iff%  $O^*$  is true.

Horwich claims that, just as the truth predicate can be dropped from (4) without losing any explanatory power, it can be left out of an analysis of reliability as well.

Unfortunately, however, the two conditional probabilities conjoined in (6) fail to capture the notion of reliability that lies at the heart of reliabilism. Consider the left-to-right conditional probability component of (6)—i.e., the claim that the probability that 'O' would be affirmed in  $C('O')$ , given  $O^*$ , is very high. Even if there is a true proposition,  $O^*$ , expressible by some possible observation sentence 'O', this does not mean that one will be likely to affirm 'O' simply because one happens to be in circumstances conducive to determining the truth value of 'O'. Suppose a subject in  $C('O')$  doesn't



care whether ‘*O*’ is true or isn’t concentrating on the relevant features of  $C(‘O’)$ . Or suppose that ‘*O*’ is completely trivial and uninteresting. Why should we expect someone to affirm it just because that person is in  $C(‘O’)$ ? There is no reason to expect subjects to affirm every observation statement they can reliably affirm. Consequently, the conditional probability

$$(8) \quad P(‘O’ \text{ would be affirmed in } C(‘O’)|O^*)$$

would seem to be quite low in most sets of circumstances. The fact, however, that this probability value is low does not mean that the belief-forming method in question is unreliable. The fact that I am unlikely to use a reliable method to form many of the true beliefs I could form were I to rely upon it does not undermine that method’s reliability. Reliability has nothing to do with the probability of anyone affirming anything—true or otherwise. A reliable method is one that ensures that most of the beliefs we actually do (or would) form using that method will be true.

Now consider the second component of (6)—the right-to-left claim that the probability of  $O^*$ , given that ‘*O*’ would be affirmed in  $C(‘O’)$ , is high. This component of Horwich’s suggestion is closer to being correct than the first component, but it suffers from serious defects as well. According to Horwich, our belief-forming processes are reliable only when

$$(9) \quad P(O^*|‘O’ \text{ would be affirmed in } C(‘O’))$$

is very high. The problem with using (9) to explicate the notion of reliability is that it makes no mention of the cognitive process (or processes) responsible for producing belief in  $O^*$ . Reliability is a matter of how often a given process results in true beliefs across a wide range of cases. For observation sentences ‘ $O_1$ ’, ‘ $O_2$ ’, . . . , ‘ $O_n$ ’ that I affirm in  $C(‘O’)$ , I could very well have relied upon a distinct belief-forming process for each ‘ $O_i$ ’. Thus, the fact that  $P(O^*|‘O’ \text{ would be affirmed in } C(‘O’))$  is high would not indicate anything about the reliability of any particular process, since a plurality of processes could have been used. Any adequate explication of reliability, then, must mention the processes that are the bearers of reliability.<sup>9</sup>

The bearers of reliability must be process types rather than process tokens because the latter are unrepeatable, causal sequences occurring at particular times and places. Consequently, you cannot ask whether a process token is reliable (i.e., whether it would produce mostly true beliefs over a wide range of cases). Distinguishing between process types and tokens and letting ‘ $R(x)$ ’ denote the reliability of  $x$ , the reliability of some process type  $T_i$  can be defined as follows:

$$(10) \quad R(T_i) = P(t_j \text{ produces a true belief} | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i).^{10}$$

<sup>9</sup>The problems raised for Horwich’s account of reliability cannot be alleviated by replacing ‘affirmed’ with ‘believed’ in (9), although this would certainly bring (9) closer to expressing the reliabilist’s notion of reliability.

<sup>10</sup>The process tokens that figure in determinations of reliability are restricted to those that succeed in issuing in belief tokens.

The expression ' $P(A|B)$ ' should be taken to denote an objective rather than an epistemic or subjective probability relation. It does not concern the degree to which  $B$  is evidence for  $A$ , the degree of conclusiveness of an inference from  $B$  to  $A$ , or anything about any subject's degrees of belief. The reliability of a process type is simply a matter of the relative frequency of true beliefs a process produces or the propensity of a process type to produce true beliefs. Subjects do not have to know or even believe that the belief-forming processes they use are reliable. They must simply be reliable. Hence, reliability must be explicated in terms of mind-independent frequencies or propensities in the world.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the merits of (10), it should be clear that one aspect of it will be unacceptable to deflationists, viz., that it appears to explain reliability in terms of truth. Deflationists, then, might try to eliminate 'true' from (10) by reformulating it as:

$$(11) \quad R(T_i) = P(\exists p(t_j \text{ produces the belief that } p \wedge p) | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i).$$

<sup>11</sup>There is one version of the frequency theory that reliabilists cannot use to interpret (10)—viz., the track record notion of frequency. According to this perspective, the reliability of a process type is the relative frequency of true beliefs among the total set of beliefs that process has actually produced. This interpretation of the notion of frequency leads to the following problem. If a highly reliable process type is used only on a single occasion and produces, on that occasion, a false belief, the relative frequency of true beliefs among the total set of beliefs produced by that process is zero. If the track record notion of frequency is correct, the reliability of that process will be zero. Yet, *ex hypothesi*, the process in question is highly reliable. This obviously unacceptable interpretation of frequency has been given more discussion and consideration that it deserves because of its early appearance in the *locus classicus* of process reliabilism [i.e., Goldman 1979]. For an instructive analysis of the correct way to think about reliability, cf. Alston [1995].

It is also important to note that reliable processes are not those that issue (or would issue) in beliefs that are independently probable. In other words,

$$(10') \quad R(T_i) = P(\text{the belief produced by } t_j \text{ is true})$$

is false. Reliable processes are those processes that issue in a sufficiently high ratio of true to false beliefs. If, for example, a process reliable to degree .9 issues (or would issue) in a set of beliefs, 90% of which are true, this does not mean that each of the beliefs produced by the target process would have a prior probability of .9 or even that their mean probability would be .9. It is the conditional objective probability function in (10) rather than the unconditional epistemic probability function in (10') that lies at the heart of reliability.

Furthermore,  $P(t_j \text{ produces a true belief} | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i)$  will not in general be equivalent to  $P(\text{the belief produced by } t_j \text{ is true} | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i)$ , for some  $i$  and some  $j$ , where both expressions are interpreted as objective probabilities. Suppose that process token  $t_j$  produces a belief in  $p$ , a necessarily true proposition.  $P(p, \text{ the belief produced by } t_j, \text{ is true} | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i)$  will be equal to 1, but no human cognitive process can be infallible. Consequently,  $P(p, \text{ the belief produced by } t_j, \text{ is true} | t_j \text{ belongs to } T_i)$  cannot represent the reliability of the process type that produced belief in  $p$ . (Thanks to Adam Leite for bringing this example to my attention.)

Reliabilists could also explicate reliability without using the idea of conditional probability by employing generalized quantifiers, albeit with some loss of explanatory power. Letting  $\mathbf{M}x(\Phi)$  mean that most of the substitution instances of ' $\Phi$ ' are true, we have:

$$(11') \quad T_i \text{ is reliable iff } \mathbf{M}t(t \text{ belongs to } T_i; \exists p(t \text{ produces the belief that } p \wedge p)).$$

The quantifier ' $\mathbf{M}t$ ' is a binary quantifier. In contrast to the more familiar unary quantifiers, ' $\forall x$ ' and ' $\exists x$ ', it cannot take a single open sentence and form a closed sentence by quantifying over its open variables. Rather, it takes two open sentences and combines them in a non-truth-functional way. The binary quantifier treats ' $t$  belongs to  $T_i$ ' and ' $t$  produces a true belief' separately, as distinct sentences, combining them in a kind of probabilistic fashion. The ':' functions merely as punctuation. Although the use of generalized quantifiers may serve reliabilists well in explicating the contrasting categories of 'reliable' and 'unreliable', it does not enable reliabilists to talk about degrees of reliability in the way that talk of conditional probability does. Thus, there is some loss of explanatory power in using generalized quantifiers rather than conditional probability. (My use of the ':' symbol is due to Sainsbury [2001: 225ff.]

If it can be shown that (11) can be used to explain everything (10) can and that what does the explanatory work in substitution instances of (10) and (11) are facts about reality generally being as beliefs produced by  $T_i$  describe it as being, then perhaps a deflationary reliabilism is possible.

Thus, it does not seem that the deflationist doctrine that truth never performs any genuine explanatory work presents an insurmountable obstacle to the possible union of reliabilism and deflationism. Reliabilists who are also deflationists would simply have a different understanding of how truth functions in explanations of reliability than reliabilists, like Goldman, who are correspondence theorists.

### III

But can (5) and (11) explain everything (4) and (10) can? Philip Kitcher [1993; 2002] doubts that deflationary explanations can succeed in explaining systematic patterns of successful action. He writes,

Individual successes can, of course, be explained by citing the content of individual beliefs: Ophelia finds her way to the brook because she believes that the path through the wicket-gate leads to the willows, as indeed it does. But the *pattern* of success and failure cannot be understood by simply stringing together these accounts of individual cases. That is explained only by noting the systematic influence of states that correspond to the ways in which the objects are disposed.

[Kitcher 1993: 167]

[U]nderstanding *systematic* success demands more than simply conjoining claims like ‘Ophelia believes that the path leads to the willows and the path does lead to the willows.’ We need to identify the generic property—correspondence to reality—that is shared by the pertinent representations.

[Kitcher 1993: 168, n20]

Kitcher believes an appeal to ‘correspondence truth’ is necessary if we want to explain the systematic success of certain kinds of beliefs, theories, or assumptions. If Kitcher is right, deflationists will be unable to explain the systematic connection between beliefs and truth that lies at the heart of reliability.

Of course, many deflationists have claimed that the truth predicate’s primary usefulness consists in its power to enable us to make certain generalizations we would not otherwise be able to make. For example, Quine [1970: 11] famously remarks:

Where the truth predicate has its utility is in just those places where, though still concerned with reality, we are impelled by certain technical complications to mention sentences. Here the truth predicate serves, as it were, to point through sentences to the reality; it serves as a reminder that though sentences are mentioned, reality is still the whole point. What, then, are the places where, though still concerned with unlinguistic reality, we are moved to proceed indirectly and talk of sentences? The important places of this kind are places

where we are seeking generality, and seeking it along certain oblique planes that we cannot sweep out by generalizing over objects.

Horwich [1998: 2–3] echoes Quine’s sentiment in his recent defence of deflationism:

In fact, the truth predicate exists solely for the sake of a certain logical need. On occasion we wish to adopt some attitude towards a proposition—for example, believing it, assuming it for the sake of argument, or desiring that it be the case—but find ourselves thwarted by ignorance of what exactly the proposition is. We might know it only as ‘what Oscar thinks’ or ‘Einstein’s principle’; perhaps it was expressed, but not clearly or loudly enough, or in a language we don’t understand; or—and this is especially common in logical and philosophical contexts—we may wish to cover infinitely many propositions (in the course of generalizing) and simply can’t have all of them in mind. In such situations the concept of truth is invaluable.

Kitcher is surely aware that deflationary theorists have long claimed that the notion of truth enables us to formulate useful generalizations. So, it must not be the ability to say something general per se that is the focus of Kitcher’s worries about deflationary explanations. Rather, it seems that Kitcher’s primary worry is that deflationary explanations ‘typically stop at a shallow level of psychological explanation’ [2002: 346].

To appreciate Kitcher’s concern, consider the following explanation offered by Horwich that Kitcher [2002: 353ff.] thinks is especially superficial and lacking in explanatory substance. Horwich [1998: 22–3] wants to show how a deflationist can explain the following thesis without relying upon the concept of truth to do any of the explanatory work:

- (12) If all Bill wants is to have a beer, and he thinks that merely by nodding he will get one, then, if his belief is true, he will get what he wants.

Horwich’s explanation begins with the following assumptions (in which ‘ $\langle p \rangle$ ’ stands for ‘the proposition that  $p$ ’):

- (i) Bill wants  $\langle$ Bill has a beer $\rangle$ . [Assumption]  
 (ii) Bill believes  $\langle$ Bill nods  $\rightarrow$  Bill has a beer $\rangle$ . [Assumption]

The following premise is an instance of the practical syllogism, an assumption connecting Bill’s belief, desire, and action:

- (iii) [Bill wants  $\langle$ Bill has a beer $\rangle$   $\wedge$  Bill believes  $\langle$ Bill nods  $\rightarrow$  Bill has a beer $\rangle$ ]  $\rightarrow$  Bill nods. [Premise]  
 (iv)  $\therefore$ , Bill nods. [from i, ii, iii]  
 (v) Bill’s belief is true. [Assumption]

- (vi)  $\therefore$ ,  $\langle \text{Bill nods} \rightarrow \text{Bill has a beer is true} \rangle$  is true. [from ii, v]
- (vii)  $\langle \text{Bill nods} \rightarrow \text{Bill has a beer is true} \rangle$  is true iff  $\text{Bill nods} \rightarrow \text{Bill has a beer is true}$ . [MT]
- (viii)  $\therefore$ ,  $\text{Bill nods} \rightarrow \text{Bill has a beer}$ . [from vi, vii]
- (ix)  $\therefore$ ,  $\text{Bill has a beer}$ . [from iv, viii]
- (x)  $\langle \text{Bill has a beer} \rangle$  is true iff  $\text{Bill has a beer}$ . [MT]
- (xi)  $\therefore$ ,  $\langle \text{Bill has a beer} \rangle$  is true. [from ix, x]
- (xii)  $\therefore$ ,  $\text{Bill gets what he wants}$ . [from i, xi]

In response to Horwich's explanation, Kitcher [2002: 355] complains,

The major instances of scientific explanation go much deeper, and I think we can emulate them in this case. Specifically, we can deepen our understanding of what is going on in successful actions by considering, among other things, the causal relations that connect items in the world with the tokens that figure in the agent's psychological states.

In the course of discussing the example of Ophelia's attempt to get to the brook by following a path past the willows, Kitcher [2002: 357] writes,

There's a causal process that fixes the reference of Ophelia's token of 'the willows', and, for simplicity, we can take it to be a process of direct perceptual confrontation with the willows... We can now begin to discern just where the appeal to correspondence comes in... [B]ecause of the causal relations between her tokens and the world and because of her current perceptions, her recognition of a line on the map causes her to follow a trajectory of a particular type, and the line's conformity to a path in the physical world, one that joins castle to willows to brook, explains why she gets where she wants to go.

However, it is difficult to see how Kitcher's invocation of causal reference-fixing conditions and features of a subject's perceptual states shows that deflationary theorists cannot provide explanations of successful human action that are as deep and satisfying as those given by correspondence theorists. In the example above, Horwich is primarily trying to show that explaining that Bill's action succeeds because his belief is *true* does not seem to be any more enlightening than explaining that Bill's action succeeds because if he nods, he will get a beer.

At no point does Horwich suggest that satisfying psychological explanations should never appeal to detailed accounts of mental representations or the various relations between perception, representation, cognition, and action. Indeed, if the deflationist claim that truth never performs any explanatory work is correct, something else must be shouldering the explanatory burden in illuminating explanations. Kitcher's claim that psychological explanations should appeal to

‘causal relations that connect items in the world with the tokens that figure in the agent’s psychological states’ may tell us something about what psychological explanations should look like. But the issue between the deflationist and the anti-deflationist is whether it tells us anything about what a theory of truth should look like. The deflationist answer to that question is ‘No’. The fact that the causal stories of the sort Kitcher alludes to may tell us a great deal about cognition and action does not mean they tell us anything about truth. Horwich claims that if his minimalist theory of truth does not tell us everything we want to know about some *explanandum*, we should supplement his theory with theories of other sorts. It is quite likely that many other objections to the apparently shallow nature of deflationary explanations in various domains can be handled in a similar fashion.

#### IV

I would like to conclude with a brief consideration of the question of whether there could be a deflationary theory of knowledge. Robert Brandom [1988: 82–3] has suggested that a deflationary theory of knowledge can be constructed that is analogous to certain deflationary theories of truth. This interesting suggestion gains some plausibility from the following analogy: in certain respects, epistemic theories of truth are to epistemic internalism as the correspondence theory is to epistemic externalism and deflationary theories of truth are (perhaps) to deflationary theories of knowledge.

Allow me to explain. During the 1970s and 1980s the primary competitors to the correspondence theory were epistemic theories of truth. The latter objected to the strong form of recognition-transcendence that correspondence theorists attributed to truth. Similarly, the primary competitors to externalist theories of knowledge and justified belief have been internalist theories that object to the form of recognition-transcendence externalists attribute to warrant or epistemic justification. Warrant and justification, in the eyes of externalists, are recognition-transcendent in a certain sense because one does not have to know that one knows (or have the justified belief that one’s belief is justified) in order to have knowledge (or justification).<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, deflationary theories of truth replaced epistemic theories as the primary competitors to the correspondence theory. Deflationists maintain that defenders of both correspondence and epistemic theories go wrong in thinking that any adequate analysis of truth—either in terms of correspondence, warranted assertability, or anything else—can be given. Some philosopher believe there might be logical space for a deflationary theory of knowledge or justified belief that denies that any analysis of these epistemological notions—either in terms of reliability, fulfilment of epistemic duty or anything else—can be given.

The prospects for such a deflationary epistemology, however, do not seem to be particularly bright. The primary reason deflationists deny that truth can be analysed is that, they claim, there are no concepts more fundamental than

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Beebe [forthcoming] for a careful analysis of the senses of recognition-transcendence involved in both epistemological externalism and realist theories of truth.

truth into which truth might be analysed. The concepts of knowledge and justified belief, by contrast, do not seem to be nearly as fundamental as the concept of truth, and if it is at all reasonable to expect successful analyses of philosophically significant concepts to be possible (an important question that deserves more philosophical attention than it receives), it seems analyses of knowledge and justified belief should be possible. And while the deflationary claim that truth performs no explanatory work has some degree of plausibility, the analogous claim that the concepts of knowledge and justified belief perform no explanatory work seems to be far less plausible.

There also do not seem to be any epistemological analogues to the platitudinous T-sentences that epistemological deflationists could use to construct their accounts of knowledge. Of course, Crispin Sartwell's [1991; 1992] defence of the thesis that knowledge is merely true belief provides one suggestion to the contrary. If knowledge is merely true belief, an epistemological deflationist could claim that every true substitution instance of the following schema counts as an axiom of his or her theory of knowledge:

- (13)  $S$  knows that  $p$  iff  $S$  believes that  $p$  and  $p$ .

However, the monumental implausibility of the claim that knowledge is nothing but true belief makes it difficult to take Sartwell's proposal very seriously. While it may be possible to construct a viable theory of knowledge or justified belief that is deflationary in some other respect than those I have considered, the prospects for a deflationary epistemology do not seem to be particularly promising.<sup>13</sup>

## V

In this essay I have examined the issue of whether reliabilism and deflationism are compatible and whether deflationists can explain reliability without according an explanatory role to truth. In regard to the question of whether theories of truth constrain or are constrained by theories of epistemic justification, our examination of the various relationships between reliabilism and deflationism suggests that the two theories do not place any significant mutual constraints upon one another.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Brandom [1988; 1994] attempts to formulate a deflationary account of knowledge that closely parallels his deflationary account of truth. Ironically, however, Brandom's accounts of truth and knowledge fail to tell us when something is true or counts as an instance of knowledge. What he gives us instead is an account of the social practices of taking things to be true and taking things to be instances of knowledge. He never tries to specify the conditions under which someone *correctly* takes something to be true or *correctly* takes something to be an instance of knowledge. His accounts of truth and knowledge, then, are, strictly speaking, not accounts of either truth or knowledge. Since he fails to give an account of knowledge at all, he cannot very well claim to have given a deflationary account of knowledge.

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