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On the Sense and Reference of the Concept of Truth*

GURPREET RATTAN

Abstract

This paper analyzes the concept of truth in terms of an account of Fregean sense as cognitive value. The account highlights the importance of *understanding-based knowledge of co-reference* for the individuation of senses. Explicit truth attributions, like ‘that *I smell the scent of violets* is true’ involve an *inter-level version* of understanding-based knowledge of co-reference in the *that-clause concepts of thoughts* that they employ: one cannot understand the that-clause concept of the thought in the truth attribution without understanding the thought the that-clause concept is a concept of. This is not a *redundancy* that eliminates or *deflates* cognitive value, but an exploitation, by the concept of truth, of the inter-level version of understanding-based knowledge of co-reference in critical reflective thinking. The cognitive value of the concept of truth is to combine semantically with explicit ways of thinking of thoughts to make critical reflective thinking possible. This account of the cognitive value of the concept of truth assigns cognitive value not by construing the concept of truth as a way of thinking about some thing, but by articulating its broader cognitive role.

This paper analyzes the concept of truth in terms of an account of Fregean sense as *cognitive value*.¹ In §1, I explain the account of sense as cognitive value. In §2 I explain the cognitive value of the concept of truth as allowing for the possibility of *critical reflective thinking*. §3 elaborates the role of the concept of truth, and in

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¹ So what is presented here is a Frege-inspired account of the concept of truth, in terms of cognitive value, and not an account of Frege’s view of truth. For that kind of account, see Richard G. Heck and Robert May, ‘Truth in Frege’ (manuscript).

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particular, of *explicit truth attributions* in critical reflective thinking. §4 concludes the paper by locating my account in the larger debate on truth.

Here is an outline of the main line of argument in the paper. The account of sense as cognitive value highlights the importance of *understanding-based knowledge of co-reference* for the individuation of senses, and even more specifically, of *understanding-based knowledge of co-reference making for the possibility of some distinctive kind of cognitive achievement* for the individuation of senses. *Explicit truth attributions*, like

that that I smell the scent of violets is true²

involve an *inter-level* version of understanding-based knowledge of co-reference in the *that-clause concepts of thoughts* that they employ: one cannot understand the that-clause concept of the thought in the truth attribution without understanding the very thought to which truth is being attributed. From the perspective provided by the account of sense as cognitive value, this is not a *redundancy* that eliminates or *deflates* cognitive value, but an exploitation by the concept of truth of understanding-based knowledge of co-reference to make possible a distinctive kind of cognitive achievement: to make possible *critical reflective thinking*. Critical reflective thinking involves as a constitutive matter the explicit conceptualization of the norm of truth. The cognitive value of the concept of truth is to combine semantically with explicit ways of thinking of thoughts to make critical reflective thinking possible. This account of the cognitive value of the concept of truth assigns cognitive value not by construing the concept of truth as a way of thinking of some thing, but by articulating its broader cognitive role.

² From this point on, I use both that-clauses and an italicization convention to make reference to thoughts. When a thought is an attribution of truth to a thought, I use both methods at once. This fixes an expressive inadequacy in the italicization convention and avoids what would otherwise be a confusing repetition of ‘that’s. So instead of ‘*I smell the scent of violets is true*’ which is strictly speaking nonsense, or the confusing but more fundamental and correct ‘that that I smell the scent of violets is true’, I will use ‘that *I smell the scent of violets* is true’ to refer to the thought that *I smell the scent of violets* is true. This use of italicization is easily distinguished from italicization for emphasis and italicization to indicate the introduction of a technical notion, both of which I also use. I also do not pause to address niceties about the context-sensitive ‘I’ in ‘*I smell the scent of violets*’. I use the example despite the ‘I’ to connect with Frege’s discussion below.

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1. Sense as Cognitive Value

The account of sense as cognitive value is an interpretation and generalization of the theoretical significance of Frege's puzzle about identity statements. This is well-trodden territory that I will not be pausing to survey. Instead, my aim in this section is to briefly explain the theoretical significance of the puzzle in a relatively novel but intuitive way. I assume basic familiarity with the puzzle. I also assume that Frege's primary focus is thought and only secondarily language.

The theoretical significance of Frege's puzzle is to bring to light the notion of the cognitive value of a concept.³ What does that mean?

The cognitive value of a concept is the contribution that grasping or understanding the concept makes to a thinker's epistemic perspective – what she knows. In a helpful but essentially incomplete slogan, if x is a concept of x , then the cognitive value of x is to make possible thinking of x as x . Thinking of x as x is to employ a particular *way of thinking* of x or to have a particular *mode of presentation* of x . So, to connect with Frege's specific version of the puzzle, unlike the thought $a = a$, the thought $a = b$ 'often contains[s] very valuable extensions of our knowledge'. These thoughts contain concepts with distinct cognitive values that, hence, are distinct concepts. Thinking of a/b as a is distinct from thinking of a/b as b . The cognitive value of these concepts is to provide these different ways of thinking of a/b .

The version of the puzzle Frege works with here focuses on how *differences* of cognitive value make for 'valuable extensions of our knowledge'. The difference between concept a and concept b shows how knowing $a = b$ extends knowledge beyond knowing $a = a$. Call this focus on cases of differences in cognitive value for the individuation of senses the *Hesperus/Phosphorus model for individuating senses*, or the *HP model* for short. The account of sense as cognitive value emphasizes in addition the importance of how the *sameness* of cognitive value can make for the extension of knowledge – what we

³ Let me acknowledge and accommodate the objection that concepts do not *have* cognitive values, but instead *are* cognitive values. Correct. The cognitive value of a concept is not something that the concept has accidentally, or even just necessarily. The cognitive value of a concept is constitutive of the concept, and individuates the concept. The idea that concepts *are* cognitive values is encouraged and not precluded by the idea that the cognitive value that a concept *has* completely determines its nature.

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can call the *Hesperus/Hesperus model for individuating senses*, or the *HH model* for short.

The HP model and the HH model are not in competition, but instead describe complementary functions of a principle of individuation for senses: to make for one sense and not two or to make for two senses and not one. The problem, however, is that there is a tendency to apply the HP model to explain why senses are different when what is called for is some explanation for why senses are to be identified. The account of sense as cognitive value corrects this tendency to overextend the application of the HP model for individuating senses and thereby corrects a tendency to error in individuating senses in tricky cases. Why is there such a tendency? The short answer is that the explanation of the general notion of sense has been driven by thinking about singular senses, and in thinking about singular senses, by excessively internalist and individualist intuitions. By thinking about sense in terms of a more general notion of cognitive value that not only uses both the HP model and the HH model, but also interprets them in terms of cognitive value and the extension of knowledge, two deficiencies in thinking about sense are overcome. Let me explain with a first application to Frege's specific version of the puzzle.

Concepts *a* and *b* differ in cognitive value. Although this difference grounds one extension of knowledge, it poses an obstacle to another. For example, from the thoughts *a is F* and *b is G* one cannot infer the thought *Something is both F and G*. No such obstacle is present for the inference from the thoughts *a is F* and *a is G* to the thought *Something is both F and G*. What differentiates the two inferences?

The inferences do not differ in the referents of the concepts the thoughts involved contain; these are the same. Nor do the inferences differ in the presence of the different linguistic expressions 'a' and 'b'; the inference is thought-theoretic and involves concepts and thoughts, not linguistic expressions.⁴ A hint as to what differentiates the two inferences comes from determining how the obstacle in the first inference is to be overcome. Plainly, what is required is the identity thought $a = b$. But this cannot be the answer to what differentiates the inferences for it just brings up the question again. What differentiates the first inference from the second and the first supplemented with the identity thought?

We should not be looking for some hidden property that differentiates the inferences; the answer is out in the open. The answer is that

⁴ Kripke's Padreweski ('A Puzzle About Belief', in *Meaning and Use* (ed.) A. Margalit (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979)) also shows that the difference cannot consist in the sameness or difference of linguistic expression.

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in the first inference there is not, but in the second inference and first inference supplemented with the identity premise there is, an *understanding-based knowledge of co-reference allowing for the immediate extension of knowledge*.⁵ This is constitutive of the identity of concept *a* and concept *a* and of the distinctness of concept *a* from concept *b*. Sameness of concept or sense is constituted by understanding-based knowledge of co-reference that allows for the immediate extension of knowledge, in this case of the immediate extension of knowledge afforded by deductively valid inference from premises. This is

Case 1: The immediate extension of knowledge through discursive justification.

Case 1 is our first example of deploying the HH model and finding an understanding-based knowledge of co-reference making for the possibility of an immediate extension of knowledge. This is a constitutive account of the sameness of sense present in the examples.

Once one sees how the HH model works here, one can begin to recognize it as one example of a more general semantic/epistemic phenomenon. Moreover, one begins to see how the individuation supported by the HH model conflicts with individuations that, almost as a reflex, incorrectly invoke the HP model. The account of sense as cognitive value guides intuitions about individuation by construing senses in their role in contributing to objective knowledge. Here are some briefly articulated and explained examples:⁶

Case 2: The immediate extension of knowledge through perceptual demonstrative tracking

*In perceptually demonstratively tracking an object, a thinker receives a continuous stream of information that is **conceptualized as being***

⁵ The 'understanding-based' limits the ambition of my account of sense as cognitive value, but does not vitiate it or render my account empty. It is meant mainly to forestall objections to the account of sense as cognitive value while still allowing the account to be described in enough detail to admit of a substantial and informative application to the concept of truth.

⁶ Kit Fine in *Semantic Relationism* (2007, Blackwell) might be understood to be suggesting some additional cases. For example, expressing one's thought in language requires one to be able say what one thinks (86); memory requires being able to remember what one was thinking earlier (1-2); tracking an object in continuous observation requires thinking about the object as the same over time (67); reporting the sayings or attitudes of another requires being able to say what the another has said or thought (1; 87).

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*about a single object through time. This allows a thinker to gain knowledge about the object over that period of time without having to establish in addition that the same object is in question over the period of time.*⁷

Case 3: The immediate extension of knowledge through joint attention

*Interlocutors' demonstrative-involving utterances are **mutually understood as being about** the object to which they are jointly attending. This allows a thinker to give and acquire knowledge about an object without having to establish in addition that one's interlocutor is talking about the same object.*

According to the account of sense as cognitive value, perceptual demonstrative tracking and joint attention involve a sameness of demonstrative concepts or senses across times and spatial viewpoints *because* of the possibility for the immediate extension of knowledge that the understanding-based knowledge of co-reference that is present in tracking and joint attention affords. Senses are identified and not distinguished in such cases despite the different spatiotemporal perspectives involved in thinking about a tracked object over time and in jointly attending to an object. It might be tempting to think of these different spatiotemporal perspectives as constituting distinct modes of presentation or ways of thinking of the relevant objects. To think this is to apply the HP model. But the account of sense in terms of cognitive value and an application of the HH model shows why and how that temptation should be resisted.⁸

Case 4: The immediate extension of knowledge through testimony

*Parties to a testimonial exchange **mutually understand the testimony as being about** the object to which the testifier refers. This allows a thinker to give and acquire knowledge about an object from testimony without having to establish in addition that the object to which the testifier refers is the object of which the recipient comes to think.*⁹

⁷ Cf. Gareth Evans 'Understanding Demonstratives' in his *Collected Papers* (1985, Oxford).

⁸ Richard Heck, in 'Do Demonstratives Have Senses' (2002, *Philosopher's Imprint*) succumbs to this temptation. For discussion see Imogen Dickie and Gurpreet Rattan, 'Sense, Communication, and Rational Engagement' (2010, *dialectica*).

⁹ I think that the real lesson of Burge's 'Individualism and the Mental' (1979, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*) is to highlight the existence and individuating relevance of this kind of objective norm of testimonial knowledge.

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According to the account of sense as cognitive value, both testifier and recipient express and comprehend the same thoughts in a testimonial exchange. This is so despite wide discrepancies in their individual beliefs about the object in question, in the limiting case discrepancies that make it appropriate to describe the testimonial exchange as one in which the recipient *acquires* conceptual competence with the relevant concepts. It might be tempting to think of these extreme discrepancies in belief as constituting distinct modes of presentation or ways of thinking of the relevant objects, but the account of sense in terms of cognitive value shows how and why this temptation should be resisted.

What I want to do now is to try to fit the concept of truth into this pattern and apply this account of sense as cognitive value to the concept of truth. Up to this point, the account of sense as cognitive value has helped to correct for excessively internalist or individualist intuitions in individuation. But what is of particular interest in what follows is that fitting the concept of truth into this pattern shows a kind of cognitive value that is not explained as the cognitive value of singular concepts or even of ordinary predicate concepts – of providing a way of thinking about an object or a property. The concept of truth is not explained as a mode of presentation or way of thinking of some thing. To reflectively understand the concept of truth, one needs to ask a more general question about the cognitive value of the concept of truth.

2. The Cognitive Value of the Concept of Truth

I begin with a distinction. There are broadly speaking two kinds of truth attributions to thoughts. First, there are truth attributions that refer to thoughts using that-clauses or ‘the proposition that’ followed by a sentence, for example, ‘that *I smell the scent of violets* is true’ or ‘the proposition that *I smell the scent of violets* is true’.¹⁰ Second, there are truth attributions that do not refer to a proposition in this highly explicit way, but either demonstrate, name, describe, or

¹⁰ There may however be important differences between that-clauses and propositional descriptions (like ‘the proposition that snow is white’). Propositional descriptions produce what Friederike Moltmann calls an ‘objectivization effect’. There are also (related) problems of intersubstitutability with that-clauses. For helpful and orienting discussion see Moltmann, ‘Propositional Attitudes Without Propositions’ (2003, *Synthese*) and Jeff King, ‘Designating Propositions’ (2002, *Philosophical Review*).

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generalize over, propositions to which truth is attributed. For example ‘That is true’ (demonstrating some proposition), ‘Axiom 2 is true’, ‘Jane’s first premise is true’ and ‘Everything Sangeet says is true’ are all truth attributions of the second sort. Call the first kind of truth attribution *explicit*, and the second, *implicit* or *blind*.¹¹

Frege famously seemed to have held a *redundancy* view about explicit truth attributions. He wrote:

...the sentence “I smell the scent of violets” has just the same content as the sentence “it is true that I smell the scent of violets”. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth. [Frege, ‘The Thought’, *Mind*, 1918/1956: 295]

Two things are of note about the view Frege expresses here. First, the redundancy of truth described here seems pretty straightforwardly to imply one extreme position on the cognitive value of the concept of truth. Since ‘nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth’, everything one can think with explicit truth attributions one can already think without them, and this suggests that the concept of truth makes no cognitive difference and hence is without cognitive value. Second, what is redundant here is the contribution of the concept of truth in *explicit* truth attributions; what Frege says here makes no commitments about the cognitive value of the concept of truth in *implicit* attributions. It is consistent with Frege’s position that the concept of truth occurs non-redundantly in *implicit* attributions.¹² So, for Frege, although explicit truth attributions are without cognitive value, truth attributions in general need not be.

So Frege need not accept a general redundancy claim. But is Frege right that explicit truth attributions are redundant, that they are without cognitive value? Upon reflection, and with the aid of the account of sense as cognitive value, this can come to look like a rather shocking claim. If explicit truth attributions are of no cognitive value, then nothing epistemic should get lost were we unable to understand explicit truth attributions. But is it really right that

¹¹ This terminology is fairly standard, although the categorization of truth attributions involving demonstrative and named ways of thinking of propositions is less often discussed. For an exception see Scott Soames, *Understanding Truth* (1999, Oxford).

¹² Cf. Jason Stanley, ‘Truth and Metatheory in Frege’ (1996, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*).

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nothing epistemic would be lost if we were unable to understand explicit truth attributions?

Blind attributions demonstrate, name, describe or generalize over thoughts, and so are in some generic sense, about thoughts. But explicit attributions too involve reference to thoughts, indeed, a kind of reference that makes explicit attributions especially explicit about the identity of the thought to which truth is attributed. But if the attribution and the thought to which the attribution is made are about different objects – the first about a thought, the second about, say, the scent of violets – how could the truth attribution be cognitively equivalent to the thought to which truth is attributed? They involve ways of thinking about different objects and properties. This is not only implausible, but perhaps even precluded by the Fregean principle that sense determines reference. Does this torpedo Frege's redundancy view?

No. The limited kind of redundancy that Frege espouses can absorb this point. Even if explicit truth attributions make reference to propositions, they still they have an in-built redundancy. Why? The contrast with blind truth attributions is paramount here. Blind truth attributions are of cognitive value because we may know a blind truth attribution, for example, *Whatever Sangeet thinks is true*, without knowing what Sangeet thinks or even being able to think the thoughts that she thinks. But we cannot think an explicit truth attribution, like that *I smell the scent of violets* is true, without knowing which thought is true or without being able to think the thought to which truth is attributed. This is because in understanding the truth attribution, one not only thinks *of* but also *with* the thought to which truth is attributed. This partially constitutive feature of the explicit way of thinking of thoughts involved in explicit truth attributions elaborates the sense in which this way of thinking of thoughts is especially *explicit* as to the identity of the thought that it is about.¹³

¹³ I do not think that the proper justification for this claim comes from thinking about the semantics of 'that'-clauses as they occur in natural language. Rather, the main source of justification is top-down: there are ways of immediately extending knowledge that constitutively require the use of ways of thinking of thoughts that themselves constitutively require one to be able to think *with* the thought being thought *about* (see below). For related discussion, but that focuses not on truth but on propositional attitude attributions, see Tyler Burge's postscripts to 'Frege and the Hierarchy' in Burge's *Truth, Thought, and Reason: Essays On Frege* (2005, Oxford) and 'Belief *De Re*' in Burge's *Foundations of Mind* (2007, Oxford); Christopher Peacocke's chapter 'Representing Thoughts' in

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So the limited kind of kind of redundancy that Frege espouses here is consistent with reference to thoughts in a truth attribution. The redundancy is grounded in the identity in explicit truth attributions between the thought to which truth is attributed and a thought that one must think in order to understand the explicit way of thinking the explicit truth attributions uses. The redundancy is based in something that falls short of a sameness of concepts (because the concept of a thought cannot be identical to the thought to which the concept refers) but that nevertheless is a kind of *inter-level* cognitive sameness in explicit truth attributions – in the way of thinking of a thought that requires thinking *with* that very thought. This cognitive sameness is really what is behind the charge of redundancy. It is in fact the HP model in action, for the way that the charge of redundancy comes about is by thinking that the explicit truth attribution is an inter-level $a = a$ type case and not an $a = b$ type case. Thinking that *I smell the scent of violets* is true is just an inter-levelly adjusted way of thinking *I smell the scent of violets*. The explicit truth attribution is, apart from the difference in level, without cognitive value.

But does this explanation rely on an incorrect application of the HP model? Is this a case for the HP model to explain why explicit truth attributions are like $a = a$ cases and not $a = b$ cases and hence are not of cognitive value? Or is it really a case for the HH model to explain how an inter-level cognitive sameness is being exploited for cognitive value? Could Frege's redundancy view be based in some such confusion? More constructively, the key question here is: might not the cognitive value of the concept of truth in explicit truth attributions consist precisely in exploiting the understanding-based knowledge of the inter-level cognitive sameness that explicit truth attributions involve? Would something of cognitive value be lost if we could not understand explicit truth attributions in which the concept of truth combines semantically with these explicit ways of thinking of a thought?

The answer is that yes, something of cognitive value would be lost. *We would no longer be able to engage in critical reflective thinking.* Understanding explicit truth attribution is partially constitutive of critical reflective thinking. The cognitive value of the concept of truth in explicit truth attributions is to semantically combine with such explicit ways of thinking of thoughts to make critical reflective thinking possible. Briefly articulated:

Peacocke *Truly Understood* (2008, Oxford); and Saul Kripke's 'Frege's Distinction Between Sense and Reference: Some Exigetical Notes' (2008, *Theoria*).

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Case 5: The immediate extension of knowledge in critical reflective thinking

*Critical reflective thinking is second-order thinking about one's first-order thinking that constitutively involves **conceptualizations of the thoughts involved in first-order thinking by thinking with the very thoughts conceptualized**, and measuring these thoughts against the standard of truth. This makes the kind of epistemic advance afforded in critical reflective thinking possible.*

Explaining Case 5 in full is beyond the scope of this paper. In the next section I focus on two key issues: first, just what critical reflective thinking is; and second, how critical reflective thinking constitutively involves the understanding of explicit truth attributions.

3. The Cognitive Value of Explicit Truth Attributions in Critical Reflective Thinking

What is critical reflective thinking? Critical reflective thinking is an epistemic resource. It is a resource for improving one's knowledge by attaining clarity on just what thought it is one's evidence supports and how. What makes critical reflective thinking *critical* is that the evaluation of one's epistemic resources is carried out while making use of the very epistemic resources one is trying to evaluate. This is borne not of epistemic perversity, but of epistemic necessity, because critical reflective thinking evaluates the most basic or central epistemic resources,¹⁴ including the most basic or central norms or rules operative in one's thinking. Critical reflective thinking does not take these basic or central norms or rules as given and aim to get thinking into conformity with them. That would be just a matter of taking special care in sticking to the rules. Critical reflective thinking genuinely evaluates basic or central norms and rules.

I think that with even this bare-bones account of critical reflective thinking we can begin to see how critical reflective thinking is such as to constitutively involve the understanding of explicit truth attributions. I explain by explaining, first, why explicit ways of thinking thoughts are constitutively involved, and second, by explaining why the concept of truth is constitutively involved.

¹⁴ By 'basic or central' I mean to flag that the general argument applies not only to norms and rules understood in a foundationalist framework, but also in more holistic ones. I cannot argue this here.

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To explain why explicit ways of thinking thoughts are constitutively involved in critical reflective thinking, I want to work with a particular example of critical reflective thinking: conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis is an epistemic resource for establishing and improving the quality of one's knowledge by attaining clarity in one's understanding of the concepts and thoughts with which one thinks. As a method, conceptual analysis makes use of a rational back and forth between intuitions about cases and explicitly formulated analyses of concepts and thoughts. If conceptual analysis is to be an example of critical reflective thinking then two things must be true of it. First, conceptual analysis must be an epistemic resource. And it is.¹⁵ Attaining clarity over concepts is an epistemic resource for purposes of critical reflective justification of first-order beliefs. Consider, for example, an analysis of the concept of *a priori* knowledge that clarifies that the relevant independence from experience in *a priori* knowledge is independence with respect to justification and not from experience that enables grasp of a thought. Such an analysis can contribute to a critical reflective justification for believing that arithmetic is *a priori* even if one needs experience to come to grasp arithmetic thoughts.¹⁶ Second, it must be the case that in analysis there is an attempt to evaluate one's understanding while making use of the very understanding that one is trying to evaluate. And there is. Conceptual analysis is done from the *inside* using the very concept in one's intuitions that one is evaluating and for which one is formulating explicit analyses.

¹⁵ This is not to say that there are no objections to the idea that conceptual analysis is an epistemic resource. This is not the place to take these objections on. But objections to the idea that conceptual analysis is an epistemic resource should be distinguished from objections to the idea that there can be any such thing as confused or incomplete understanding and objections to the idea that there is any distinctive epistemic method of conceptual analysis. If there is such a thing as confused or incomplete understanding and there is a distinct epistemic method of conceptual analysis, then conceptual analysis is an epistemic resource for improved clarity and for achieving the kind and quality of knowledge that clarity affords.

¹⁶ In other work, I explain some philosophically interesting examples in which conceptual analysis provides critical reflective justifications: how an analysis of vague concepts can give critical reflective justification for thinking that Mars was always either dry or not dry (Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, 2007: 43–35); how a semantics for 'average' can give critical reflective justification for thinking that the average American can have 2.3 children even though no one has or could have 2.3 children (Kennedy and Stanley, 'On average', 2009, *Mind*).

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So what is the role of explicit truth attributions in conceptual analysis? I break this up into two questions: one about the role of explicit ways of thinking of thoughts, and one about the role of the concept of truth.

What is the role of explicit ways of thinking of thoughts? It is likely clear that the rational back and forth between intuitions about cases and putative analyses in conceptual analysis requires being able to think *with* the concept being analyzed in one's intuitions *and* being able to think *about* the concept in the formulation of analyses. But it is likely not clear that what is required is not just this, but a way of thinking about the concept under analysis that requires an understanding-based knowledge of the cognitive sameness between the concept being thought *about* and that is under analysis and the concept that is being thought *with* in one's intuitions about examples. The rational back and forth in conceptual analysis requires this understanding-based knowledge of inter-level cognitive sameness because conceptual analysis does not require that it be *in addition* established that the concept being thought about in the analysis is one and the same concept as that with which one is thinking in one's intuitions *before* analyses and intuitive judgments can be brought to rationally bear on each other. Conceptual analysis makes use of a way of thinking about concepts that requires being able at the same time to think with those concepts. But these ways of thinking are explicit ways of thinking of concepts and thoughts. So critical reflective thinking, or at least the kind present in conceptual analysis, constitutively involves explicit ways of thinking about thoughts and concepts.

What is the role of the concept of truth? What does attaining clarity over thoughts have to do with the concept of truth? Achieving clarity is a matter of getting the *truth conditions* right. Why? The quick answer is that getting the truth conditions right is essential in cases where one's most basic standards are under challenge. Justification in the face of challenges to the most basic standards cannot unproblematically assume the correctness of those standards, and must include some notion of evaluating the most basic standards themselves. But against what are the most basic standards evaluated? The idea is that they are measured against the standard of truth. On this view, the concept of truth is essential to critical reflective thinking because it invokes the standard of standards, and critical reflective thinking needs, because of its critical nature, such a standard.¹⁷

¹⁷ There is a lot to say about this idea of a standard for standards that I cannot go into (for more than one reason) here. One important issue is that truth is a kind of *formal* and not *substantive* standard. By this I mean that

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More explicitly: Achieving clarity over concepts and thoughts is an epistemic resource, and functions in critical reflective justification of first-order beliefs. To know the conditions under which a thought is not true but instead is *F* will not interact with knowledge of the obtaining of those conditions to critically reflectively justify believing some thought because it will not critically reflectively justify believing that the thought is true. For example, suppose that we choose *F* to be the concept of being recommended for belief by our best standards. Then

- (1) that X is *a priori* knowledge that p **is recommended for belief by our best standards** iff X is knowledge that p that is justificationaly independent of experience [analysis of *a priori knowledge*]

together with

- (2) that X is knowledge that is justificationaly independent of experience [assumption]

entail

- (3) that X is *a priori* knowledge that p **is recommended for belief by our best standards**,

and knowledge of this entailment (including its premises) should give critical reflective justification for the belief that X is *a priori* knowledge that p. But it does not because it does not give justification in the case that our best standards are under challenge, which is exactly the case in which *critical reflective* justification is required. Contrast the case where *F* = the concept of truth. Then

- (1T) that X is *a priori* knowledge that p **is true** iff X is knowledge that p that is justificationaly independent of experience [analysis of *a priori knowledge*]

together with

- (2T) X is knowledge that is justificationaly independent of experience [assumption]

entail

- (3T) that X is *a priori* knowledge that p **is true**

truth does not provide epistemic guidance, but instead merely allows for the possibility of inquiry into the most basic standards when the most basic standards are under challenge. Another important issue is flagged in the next note.

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and knowledge of this entailment (including its premises) *does* give critical reflective justification for the belief that X is *a priori* knowledge that p, even in the case where one's best standards are under challenge.¹⁸

To believe with critical reflective justification is to believe on the basis of one's clearest understanding that what one believes, explicitly specified, is true. It is to think with an explicit truth attribution. So I conclude that explicit truth attributions play an essential role in conceptual analysis and critical reflective thinking, and that the cognitive value of the concept of truth is to combine semantically with the explicit ways of thinking of thoughts to make critical reflective thinking possible. This is an account of the cognitive value of the concept of truth that does not think of its cognitive value in terms providing a way of thinking about some thing. Its cognitive value springs from a broader role it plays in knowledge.

4. Conclusion: The Cognitive Value of the Concept of Truth Between Deflationism and Inflationism

The account of sense as cognitive value provides a framework for theorizing not only the cognitive value of the concept of truth, but also for understanding the major positions on truth that have defined much of the literature on truth over the last one hundred years or so. We have already noted how a *redundancy view* marks one end of a spectrum on the cognitive value of the concept of truth. The idea that we can think *without* the concept of truth anything that we can think *with* it gives clear sense to the view that the concept of truth is of no cognitive value. But what about the other major views? And where does the analysis that I have given here fit amongst the other major views? I conclude with a brief discussion of these issues.

The redundancy view is implausible for a number of reasons, but one major reason is that it has nothing to say about blind attributions. The more sophisticated *deflationary view* improves on the redundancy view on this point. Unlike the redundancy view, the deflationary view *does* assign cognitive value to the concept of truth, in blind truth attributions. Blind truth attributions are not cognitively equivalent to any thought that does not involve (as a constituent of the thought) the concept of truth. Although this is an improvement on the redundancy view, there remains the question of the cognitive

¹⁸ There is more to say here about general issues about question-begging. These are issues about the nature of critical reflective thinking in general. This however is not the place to go into these.

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value of explicit truth attributions. The deflationary view does not see any possibility for cognitive value here. The way in which explicit truth attributions are especially explicit about the identity of the thoughts to which they attribute truth and that requires as a constitutive matter being able to think the thought to which truth is attributed, precludes explicit truth attributions from having cognitive value.

From the inflationary perspective, the way that the deflationary view rescues the cognitive value of the concept of truth amounts to too little, too late. *Traditional inflationary theories*, like the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist theories of truth, assign cognitive value to explicit truth attributions. Let us focus on the correspondence view as representative. The idea that truth is correspondence is the idea that explicit truth attributions give a way of thinking of special thing, the relation of correspondence. Thinking

that *I smell the scent of violets* is true

is to think something that goes beyond thinking

I smell the scent of violets,

for it involves thinking that the thought corresponds to the facts. This is a standard way of explaining the cognitive value of a concept – as providing a way of thinking of a thing – and as such assimilates the concept of truth to concepts that provide ways of thinking of some thing. But for those with deflationary proclivities these views are much too metaphysical and fail to understand something special about the concept of truth that differentiates it from ordinary concepts that provide ways of thinking about things.

A more streamlined version of the inflationary view can be culled from some classic work of Anil Gupta and more recent work from John Collins.¹⁹ On this kind of *metaphysically lightweight inflationary view*, the concept of truth is not a concept of a special thing, like the correspondence relation, and its cognitive value is not to provide a way of thinking of this special thing. The key idea in these views is that the cognitive value of the concept of truth derives from the cognitive *inequivalence* of a truth attribution with the thought to which it attributes truth. The view is applies not only to blind but also explicit truth attributions. On these views, one can understand the thought

¹⁹ See Anil Gupta, 'A Critique of Deflationism' (1993, *Philosophical Topics*) and John Collins, 'Declarative Thought, Deflationism and Metarepresentation' in D. Griemann and G. Siegart (eds), *Truth and Speech Acts: Studies in the Philosophy of Language* (2007, Routledge).

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that *I smell the scent of violets* is true

even if one cannot understand the thought

I smell the scent of violets.

The up-down of semantic ascent with reference to a thought and semantic descent by attribution of truth allows for the *extension of one's conceptual resources*, and it is the possibility of this kind of extension that, on this view, constitutes the cognitive value of the concept of truth.

These metaphysically lightweight inflationary provide an account of the concept of truth that recognizes that the concept of truth as special, not in providing a way of thinking of a special thing, like the correspondence relation, but in being a special way of thinking of ordinary things – via the up-down of semantic ascent and descent. This is attractive in certain ways, but it suffers in giving up the very intuitive idea that one cannot understand an explicit truth attribution to a thought without understanding the thought to which truth is attributed. It assigns cognitive value to the concept of truth *at the expense of* this intuitive idea about what is involved in understanding explicit truth attributions.

The account of the cognitive value of the concept of truth that I have provided here avoids the problems with both deflationary and metaphysically lightweight inflationary views. My view accommodates inflationary constraints by explaining the cognitive value of the concept of truth by assigning cognitive value to explicit truth attributions. My view accommodates deflationary constraints by explaining the cognitive value of explicit truth attributions in accordance with the intuitive idea that understanding an explicit truth attribution requires understanding the thought to which truth is attributed. In fact, it makes a cognitive virtue of this intuitive idea about explicit truth attributions. The very source of the cognitive value of the concept of truth is understanding-based knowledge of the the inter-level cognitive sameness in explicit truth attributions, between the thought the truth attribution is about and the thought one must think in order to understand the explicit truth attribution.

On the view defended here, the cognitive value of the concept of truth is to combine with an explicit way of thinking of thoughts to make critical reflective thinking possible. I defended this by considering an example of critical reflective thinking – that of conceptual analysis. Focusing on this example allows one final illuminating

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comparison to be made amongst inflationary views. Whereas traditional inflationary views construe the concept of truth as a *concept of a special thing*, like the correspondence relation, and streamlined inflationary views construe it as *special concept of ordinary things*, the view that I have defended here construes it as a concept that makes possible *more complete concepts of concepts of ordinary things*. The cognitive value of the concept of truth is not to allow not an *extension of*, but *mastery over*, one's conceptual resources, and over one's epistemic perspective more generally.²⁰

GURPREET RATTAN's (gurpreet.rattan@utoronto.ca) *primary interests are in the philosophy of language, mind, and epistemology. His current project attempts to articulate unified accounts of truth, disagreement, and relativism, accounts organized around issues about the semantics and epistemology of the metarepresentation involved in critical reflective thinking and disagreement. His longer term project is on the comparative metaphysics and epistemology of propositions and numbers.*

²⁰ There is much more on the issues broached in this conclusion in my manuscript 'Truth Incorporated'.