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Book Review

Marian David. *Correspondence and Disquotation: An Essay on the Nature of Truth*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. x + 206 pages.

1 The material of this book is divided into six chapters and a short appendix. Chapter 1 is an introduction. It consists of preliminary discussions of substantive and deflationary accounts of truth, correspondence and disquotation conceptions of truth, truth theory and its structure, and the bearers of truth. The second chapter is a survey of the main issues and tasks of a correspondence conception of truth. The third is a brief discussion of the main motivations for deflationism. The fourth is a detailed analysis of the thesis of disquotationalism and its appropriate formulation. The fifth, which is the longest chapter (about 80 pages), is an elaborate critique of disquotationalism. Chapter 6 is a two-page review of the book's central conclusion: disquotationalism fails because it has too many absurd consequences, and a correspondence conception of truth seems to be the only feasible alternative for someone who wishes to hold on to the basic intuition that 'Snow is white is true' if and only if snow is white. The appendix shows that the liar paradox is formalizable in a language whose truth predicate is defined disquotationally, and hence the liar and liar-like phenomena present similar challenges to both conceptions of truth, correspondence and disquotation.

David's book is really a critical essay on disquotationalism. It is very likely the most elaborate study of disquotationalism available in the philosophical literature to date. Out of the 188 pages that make the philosophical text of the book, 155 pages are almost entirely devoted to discussing disquotationalism. The one chapter allocated to the exposition of correspondence accounts of truth is included mostly for the sake of motivating disquotationalism. The latter, being a radically deflationist account of truth, is best seen when contrasted with the theory that it seeks to deflate.

2 Theories of truth are of two kinds, substantive and deflationary. Proponents of the first kind believe that the concept of truth has a deep nature that requires an ideologically sophisticated and ontologically rich philosophical account. Advocates of the

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second kind think that the nature of the concept is fairly simple, and the heavy philosophization that usually takes place in substantive accounts of truth should be allocated to other philosophical disciplines. David does not say that exactly. He thinks that deflationists are proposing an anti-theory of truth, an account that denies that truth has a nature at all.

A theory of truth is, of course, about the nature of the concept of truth. It is not a theory of what is true. I take it that the whole quest of human inquiry is to find what is true. For instance, we try to find what is true in ethics, in physics, in mathematics, that is, the truths of ethics, of physics, of mathematics. One might claim that there are no such truths; others (almost all of us, I hope) believe that there are such truths, and we would like to find them, characterize them, understand them, or inquire into our knowledge of them. The word 'truth' designates the concept of truth as well as something (a claim, statement, sentence, belief, et cetera) that is true. Truth theory obviously is about the former; its goal is to find out what truth is. A truth theorist attempts to answer the question,"What is the nature of truth?" A mathematician may attempt to answer the question,"What are the truths of set theory?" Hence, to be a deflationist about the concept of truth is not necessarily to be deflationist about the truths of human knowledge; it is not necessarily to be anti-objectivity, anti-realist, anti-facts, and so forth. I stress this (admittedly, simple) point because the failure to observe this obvious distinction might obscure other important distinctions. David, of course, is not guilty at all of obscuring this distinction.

So, what is the nature of truth? Correspondence and disquotational conceptions of truth share the following starting point: the intuition encoded by the Tarskian schema is a fundamental intuition about truth. (The Tarskian schema is the schema whose instances are the biconditionals of the form '*x* is true if and only if *p*' where '*p*' is replaced by a declarative sentence and '*x*' by an expression that stands for that sentence.) Whereas disquotationalism *seems* to stop at the fundamental intuition, correspondence proceeds to cash out this intuition in terms of a correspondence relation. Correspondence tells us that a Tarskian biconditional, such as ' "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white,' holds because of a deeper reason located in the nature of truth: the truth of a sentence consists in its correspondence to a fact. Thus, if it is a fact that snow is white, then the sentence 'Snow is white' is true, and vice versa.

Such a conception, as David explains using Quine's distinction of ideology and ontology, commits its advocate to the *ideology* of correspondence and to the *ontology* of facts. The story, however, gets more complicated. Once we speak of a correspondence between two things, we need to give an account of the nature of the relation and the relata involved. David does not give such an account; rather in chapter 2 he lists, motivates, and explains the tasks that one is required to accomplish in order to give a complete story of such an account. Some readers, given the title of the book, might find this disappointing. I do not think that David's strategy is a faulty one (though the book's title might be). For, as mentioned earlier, this book is really about disquotationalism, and correspondence is considered in the book only insofar as it is needed to give a contrasting background for disquotationalism.

In that chapter (chapter 2) David explains how direct correspondence (a true sentence corresponds to a fact, a false sentence does not) will not be adequate. So he introduces the notion of state of affairs. A sentence represents a state of affairs, and

the sentence is true just in case the state of affairs obtains. Hence, facts are states of affairs that obtain.[1] He then moves to discuss some of the difficult tasks facing a representational correspondence, alluding to Frege-inspired arguments. He tells us that giving a satisfactory reply to these arguments constitutes "perhaps the most pressing task for any account of state of affairs" (p. 37). Unfortunately (and quite surprisingly) he never elaborates on these arguments. He does not even offer a single example of a Frege-inspired argument. He does give, instead, general remarks and descriptions of the main strategies of these arguments.[2] A reader who knows the literature well should be able to construct a couple of such arguments that are relevant to the present context. Most readers, I believe, will find his general remarks not very helpful.

The ideological and ontological commitments of correspondence conceptions of truth, in my opinion, supply the best motivation for a deflationist conception of truth. Some advocates of deflationary accounts of truth are nominalists who are motivated by some version or another of eliminative physicalism; other advocates of such accounts are not. Field ([2], [3]) is a philosopher of the first group; Horwich [4] is one of the second. Horwich takes the primary truth bearers to be propositions and he accepts the view that 'true' is a genuine property-ascribing predicate. According to Horwich, therefore, truth is an abstract property, whose primary bearers are abstract entities. It is clear that Horwich's deflationism (which he calls *minimalism*) is not motivated by a reaction to the correspondence theory's rich ontology. Horwich's minimalism and many other deflationary conceptions of truth (including the one I defend in my own book, [5]) are motivated by the belief that the rich ontology and sophisticated ideology postulated by a correspondence theory seem to lack any explanatory force regarding the employment of the concept of truth, and hence a commitment to such an ideology and ontology is unwarranted.

David's discussion in chapter 2 makes clear the complexity and thickness of the notions and entities involved in an adequate correspondence account of truth: a sentence is true if and only if it *represents* a *state of affairs* that *obtains*, where the state of affairs represented by a sentence is *determined* by the *meaning* of that sentence, and where a state of affairs that obtains is a *fact* of the world. I think anyone reading chapter 2 with some care would realize the massive and daunting tasks and the elaborate ideological and ontologically commitments awaiting correspondence theorists. One might be willing to accept all of that, if she believes that the resulting theory is endowed with an extraordinary explanatory power *as a theory of the concept of truth*.

David does not discuss the explanatory force of the correspondence theory's postulated ontology and ideology. This is quite surprising, given that he is fully aware of this motivation for deflationism. He discusses this motivation in the first section of chapter 3 (which is a short chapter consisting of nine pages and is divided into two sections; the second section deals with the second motivation, eliminative physicalism). In section 1, we are told of a "basic motivation for deflationism"; it is the conviction that the correspondence theory in all of its forms is "a vacuous pseudoexplanation that trades in mysterious pseudoentities devoid of any explanatory value" (p. 53). If this point is presented as an objection for correspondence theories of truth, an advocate of such theories needs to show that the types of entities postulated (such as "state of affairs" and "facts") and the notions employed (such as "correspondence" and "obtaining") do indeed have explanatory force and that they are not dispensable,

that is, she should argue that they are at least necessary for an adequate account of truth.

Instead of attempting to argue for the explanatory role these entities and notions play in a theory of truth, David attempts to show that disquotationalism, by relying on minimal conceptual and ontological resources, fails to produce an adequate account of truth. Thus, he concludes:

> I have contrasted the correspondence theory of sentence-truth with the disquotational theory of sentence-truth. The failure of the latter does not establish the former. There are other accounts: "anti-realist" accounts that propose to explain truth in epistemic terms. I have neglected these accounts partly because I think that a disquotationalist would not be much tempted by them. Antirealist accounts have difficulty holding on to the simple idea that stands at the beginning of disquotationalism. It is the correspondence theory that shares the disquotationalist's concern for this simple idea. So the failure of disquotationalism should lead to approval for the correspondence theory of sentence-truth, assuming one wishes to preserve the simple idea that 'Snow is white' is true just in case snow is white. (p. 188)

His concluding argument, therefore, is this.

(P1) The correspondence theory shares disquotationalism's commitment to preserving the fundamental intuition represented by biconditionals such as ' "Snow is white is true" if and only if snow is white.'

(P2) It is quite unlikely that an antirealist account of truth (such as coherentism) would be able to preserve this intuition.

Therefore,

(C1) anyone who wishes to preserve the fundamental intuition about truth should find in the failure of disquotationalism, as an adequate theory of truth, a cause for approval for the correspondence theory of truth.

Now given (C1) and the main negative conclusion of the book,

(P3) disquotationalism is unattainable as a theory of truth,

the desired conclusion follows:

(C2) anyone who wishes to preserve the fundamental intuition about truth should approve of (or at least sympathize with) the correspondence theory.

I take it to be clear that (C2) indeed follows from (C1) and (P3). (C1), however, does not follow from (P1) and (P2). Someone who wishes to hold on to the fundamental intuition about truth and who accepts the truth of (P1), (P2), and (P3) might, with good reason, not find comfort in the correspondence theory. For there might be another deflationary account of truth that is less problematic than both disquotationalism and the correspondence theory and that is, as most deflationary accounts of truth are, equally committed to preserving that intuition. The inference from (P1) and (P2) to (C1) is only as strong as it is reasonable to believe (a) that disquotationalism is a good representative of all deflationary accounts of truth and (b) that the postulated ideology and ontology of the correspondence theory is justifiable.

David does not make the case for either one. He readily admits that disquotationalism is an extreme version of a deflationary account of truth: "Disquotationalism is the most notorious and, in my judgment, the most radical of the deflationary views about truth" (p. 5), and "Disquotationalism is a radically deflationary theory of truth for sentences" (p. 52). Despite this realization, the author still wants, I believe, his negative conclusion about disquotationalism to be indicative of deflationary accounts in general. There are many places where the discussion in the book is aimed at deflationism and deflationism-versus-correspondence rather than disquotationalism and disquotationalism-versus-correspondence. For instance, he describes his book as an essay "intended as a contribution to the debate between substantivism and deflationism" (p. 4). I agree with David that disquotationalism is a radical version of deflationism, and hence I do not think that it is a good and fair representative of deflationary accounts in general. Thus, his negative conclusion about disquotationalism, that it is unattainable as a theory of truth, cannot without further ado be generalized to all deflationary views about truth.

With polemic force David expresses in chapter 3 the deflationist's deep suspicion about the project of correspondence. I give below an extended quotation of a passage that illustrates the point quite well.

> According to the deflationist, the correspondence theorist has simply invented these mysterious entities to do everything she wants to be done. And how easy it is to invent them. Just take a sentence '*p*' that is either true or false, build a phrase of the form 'the state of affairs that *p*', maintain that the result denotes an object, and you get as many states of affairs as you need. Also, pick a convenient term, like 'obtains', and proceed like this: whenever '*p*' is true, say that the state of affairs that *p* obtains, and whenever '*p*' is false, say that the state of affairs that *p* does not obtain. These rules tell you how to project states of affairs and obtaining from sentences, truth, and falsehood. But at the same time these projection rules show that states of affairs and obtaining can be understood only in terms of what they are supposed to explain. They can serve only to create the illusion that the [representational correspondence] theory tells us anything about truth and falsehood. (pp. 53–54)

There is no attempt made in this book, however, to ease this suspicion. No explanation is offered of how this reduction of the notion of *true sentence* to the notion of *obtaining state of affairs* is supposed to work. Instead, we are told that the failure of disquotationalism as a theory of truth should lead to an approval for the correspondence theory, if one would want to preserve the basic idea encoded by the Tarskian schema. But again, this could only be the case if it were shown that there is no feasible way of preserving this basic idea without presupposing the notions (i.e., ideology) and entities (i.e., ontology) postulated by the representational correspondence theory. In this case, such an ideology and ontology would be justified for someone who takes this basic idea as a fundamental intuition about truth that must be preserved by any adequate account of truth, because the *unique* ability of the correspondence theory to accommodate this fundamental intuition would show the explanatory force of these notions and entities, and hence it would serve as an adequate justification. I already mentioned that David does not discuss the explanatory role of such entities and notions. Hence, (b), like (a), remains without justification in the book.

3 This, I hope, will not obscure the book's merits. David's notable accomplishments are (at least) two: chapter 4 presents the most elaborate discussion of the proper formulation of the thesis of disquotationalism, and chapter 5 delivers, among other things, the most serious challenge to disquotationalism as formulated in the previous chapter.[3] Many readers might find both chapters quite tedious because of David's style of covering a great many details and taking into consideration the chaff as well as the wheat. Given my strong preference for a concise and condensed presentation of ideas, I find myself in total sympathy with those readers. The style I prefer, however, might be seen by many as a vice rather than a virtue.

In chapter 4 David takes the reader on a long tour through many attempts at giving disquotationalism its proper formulation. It culminates with the following definition of truth:

(D) x is a true sentence $=_{\mathrm{Df}} (\Sigma p)(x = \text{`}p\text{'} \ \& \ p)$.

The notation '(Σp)' represents a substitutional existential quantifier whose domain is the class of all declarative sentences of the relevant language. Thus the expression "$(\Sigma p)(x = \text{`}p\text{'} \ \& \ p)$" abbreviates an infinite disjunction, each of whose disjuncts is obtained by replacing a declarative sentence (of the relevant language) for 'p' in the expression "$(x = \text{`}p\text{'} \ \& \ p)$."[4] The reason for this cumbersome definition is that the disquotationalist in the book is only permitted access to quite minimal resources (in the spirit of extreme deflationism).[5] For instance, he would not be justified in saying that the conditions under which a sentence is true are exactly what the sentence asserts. Hence, he is forced to express his thesis in terms of an infinite list without being able to "describe" the fundamental feature (of the concept of truth) that the list is "displaying."

(D) makes disquotationalism very much language-laden; it totally restricts the concept of truth that it explicates to the specific language under consideration. This, I believe, is the most serious challenge to disquotationalism that emerges from the discussion in chapter 5. Indeed David discusses many other problems in that chapter, and most readers stand to learn a great deal from his discussion. In my judgment, however, the most substantive difficulties that face disquotationalism all arise from this single problem.[6]

These two accomplishments alone make David's recent book a significant contribution to truth theory. If you add to this the detailed and informative expositions and analyses of many important ideas and notions presented in the book, you can readily appreciate the rewards of reading it.

NOTES

1. Direct correspondence is usually associated with Russell and representational correspondence with Austin and recent investigators of situation semantics.

2. It seems fashionable these days to allude to important arguments without bothering to present them. Davidson ([1], p. 266) also alludes to important arguments due to Frege and Gödel without giving an example or even a reference. David, on the other hand, gives a vague reference (p. 36n) to books and articles that contain "important contributions" to the discussion of Frege-inspired arguments.

3. I did not list David's discussion of correspondence (chapter 2) as one of the book's accomplishments. As interesting and informative as his discussion is, it is, nonetheless, expository in nature and mostly familiar.

4. The disjunction, of course, need not be infinite. If the language, however, has infinitely many sentences, the disjunction is infinite. Since all natural languages are of this sort, I took the disjunction to be infinite.

5. David is not being unfair to disquotationalism. His understanding of disquotationalism as an extremely minimal theory of truth squares well with the understanding of most notable disquotationalists, such as Quine and Field.

6. I initially intended in this review to include a positive proposal of a deflationary account of truth, to argue that it is not subject to the language-laden problem of (D), and to contrast this proposal with correspondence notions of truth. But, in fairness to David and his book, this review had to be concluded and printed. It was already delayed, due to circumstances mostly outside my control, for more than a year. Hence, I decided not to include such a discussion here. This will have to wait for a future publication—perhaps soon.

REFERENCES

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